COIN-OPS, CARTS AND COMPUTER SOFTWARE REVIEWS

VIDEO GAMES™

MARCH 1984
U.S. $2.95
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No. 18

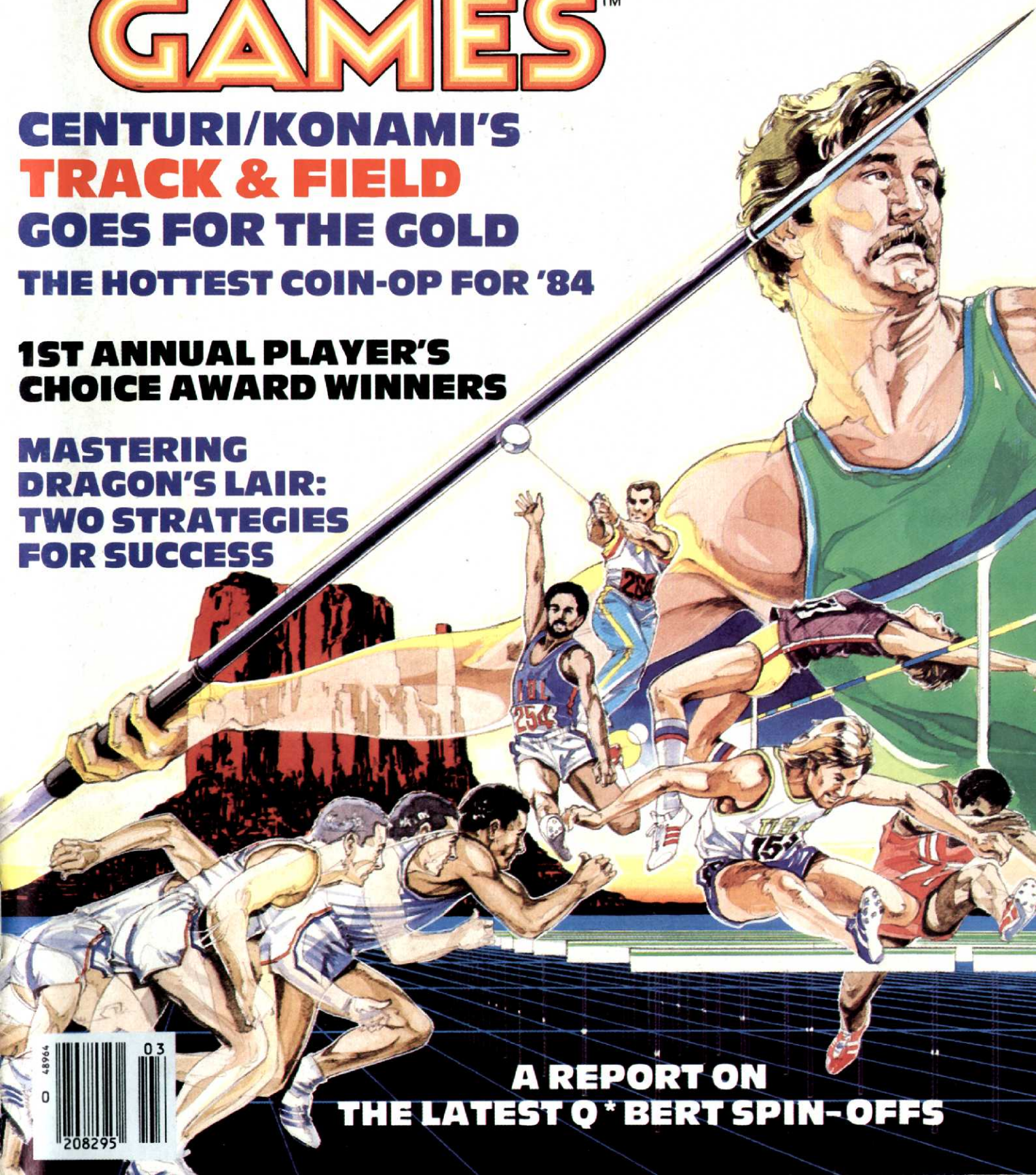
A SPECIAL ASTROCADE UPDATE

CENTURI/KONAMI'S TRACK & FIELD GOES FOR THE GOLD

THE HOTTEST COIN-OP FOR '84

1ST ANNUAL PLAYER'S CHOICE AWARD WINNERS

MASTERING DRAGON'S LAIR: TWO STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS



A REPORT ON THE LATEST Q*BERT SPIN-OFFS

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Hear at last. Games with

Alien annihilation never sounded so good.

Because we've broken the sound barrier on home computer games. With music. You heard right. Music.

And we're not talking mamby-pamby little bleeps here, pal. We're talking toe-tapping, finger-snapping, Top-40 stuff. Scored just for our newest releases. And playing throughout.

Which ought to keep a Joystick Jockey like yourself humming right along through each and every blast, bomb and blow-up that threatens your existence.

From strategy games to shoot 'em ups.

Are you ready to face the music?

If Our Music Has You Hearing Things, Wait Till You See This.

Incredible, arcade-quality graphics.

And they're so great—how great are they? They're so great you'll want to play them again and again. And then you'll tell your friends about them. And they'll want to play. And then your family will find out and they'll all want to play. And then that fat kid down the block will want to play. And all your sister's friends. And their boyfriends. And . . . better keep our newest releases a secret. Or get Dad to pop for another Atari.

The First Games Ever, That Tell You What The Heck Is Going On, Right At The Start.

It's just like a movie.

Except, instead of filling both hands with buttery popcorn, you've got your hand on the Joystick, tensed up for what's to come.

And while you wait, poised, ready, eager, you'll find out, through the terrific screen titles, the objective of the game, the characters and the scenario.

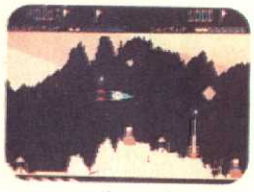
You'll find out what planet you're on.

What the fuss is all about.

Why you're involved.

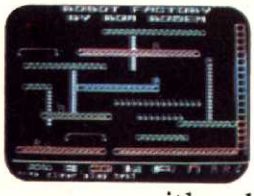
And perhaps of singular importance to you, how to keep from being obliterated.

real music for your Atari.*

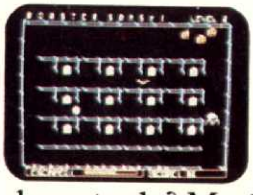


Our star. Our Numero Uno. The Tail of Beta Lyrae.™ Changes as you play. Will drive you out of your mind with unexpected switcheroonies. No one's ever mastered it. But you sure can try...

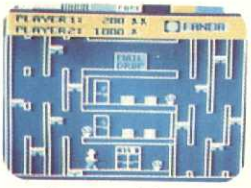
And then there's Cosmic Tunnels.™ Four games in one. Meaning four times the challenge. Four times the chance you might just get blown away. The graphics are sure to blow your mind!



Mr. Robot and His Robot Factory.™ Looking for a factory job? Here's an opening. Help Mr. Robot thwart the aliens. Screens scream with color, action and sound! Plus, a graphics kit to design your own game screens!



Monster Smash™ is the gravest game to ever hit the cemetery. And it's filled with a deathly strategy. What do you have to do? Mash the monsters! Let the visitors live.



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VIDEO GAMES

page 38

page 44

page 55

page 29

Volume 2, Number 6 March 1984

FEATURES

Video Games' First Annual Players' Choice Awards 21
The ballots are counted and here are the winners.

SPECIAL SECTION

Athletic Feats 24
Going for The Gold with Centuri/Konami's Track & Field

Follow The Leader 28
Spin-offs jump to the Q*bert challenge.

Beating The Coin-Ops 42
Tips and strategies for the latest arcade games.

A Double Play Combination 32
Will Xonox video games be K-Tel's "greatest hits"?

Video Games Interview 55
Epyx's Michael Katz: Making it through marketing.

Another look at Astrocade 68
Is it "extended play" for this company?

Rock Music's Journey 70
Ros Valory talks about their video game hit.

DEPARTMENTS

HYPERSPACE 6
Insights into the issue at hand.

BLIPS 10
Automan, amazin' case, camping out, lessons in learning, star struck.

COIN-OP SHOP 37
Contenders and Pretenders for '84: Track & Field, Professor Pac-Man, Astron Belt, Bega's Battle, Dinosaurs.

GAME EFFORTS 51
Coleco's Super Action Baseball and Super Action Boxing.

COMPUTER CORNER 60
Setting sights on sensational software: Squeeze, Gruds in Space, Gateway to Apshai, A.E. and more.

BOOK BEAT 73
Reading up on the Timex/Sinclair computer.

SOFT SPOTS 75
Home carts spring into action: Dreadnaught Factor, Treasure of Tarmin, Congo Bongo, Time Pilot, Frogger and more.

STATS 82

Cover Illustration Courtesy of Centuri/Konami

WELCOME TO APSHAI. YOU'RE JUST IN TIME FOR LUNCH.

Boy, have you taken a wrong turn. One moment you're gathering treasure and the next you're being eyed like a side of beef.

You're in the Gateway to Apshai.™ The new cartridge version of the Computer Game of the Year,* Temple of Apshai.™

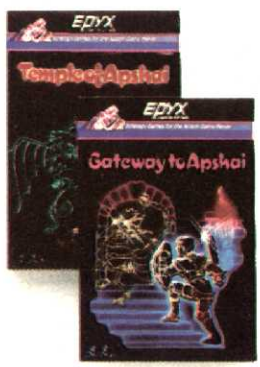
Gateway has eight levels. And over 400 dark, nasty chambers to explore. And because it's joystick controlled, you'll have to move faster than ever.

But first you'll have to consider your strategy. Is it treasure you're after? Or glory? You'll live longer if you're greedy, but slaying monsters racks up a higher score.

The Apshai series is the standard by which all other adventure games are judged. And novices will not survive.

They'll be eaten.

One player; Temple of Apshai, disk/cassette; Gateway to Apshai, cartridge, joystick control.



EPYX COMPUTER SOFTWARE

STRATEGY GAMES FOR THE ACTION-GAME PLAYER.

*Game Manufacturers Association, 1981

HYPERSPACE

Another new year is well underway and, although personal computers may have moved into the spotlight over the Christmas season, it's safe to say that video games are far from dead. In many respects, all the concern about the falling off in popularity of home video games or the fact that the arcade business may still be down, aren't proof that these entertainment forms should be thought of as fads. They're not.

In fact, if anything, both product categories have undergone a tremendous amount of growth and adaptation to keep up with the times. If one is willing to view the home market as an area in flux, it may be easier to understand why so many manufacturers have failed to sustain their fair share of profits and subsequently faded from the scene. The crux of the problem was the inability of these companies to provide innovative play action, themes and design treatments.

For now, in terms of video games, it's safe to say that the best is yet to come. In fact, featured this month in *Video Games* is the current best and brightest from Centuri/Konami. This coin-op tandem has already enjoyed substantial success in the past, but with Track & Field they appear to have struck gold as this entry has broken way out in front of the competition. Catch the inside story of this remarkable arcade game on page 24, and then turn to "Coin-Op Shop" (page 37) for a pair of reviews detailing its unique action and challenge.

While we're on the subject of the best, the final results of Video Games First Annual Players' Choice Awards are in and you'll discover the two big winners on page 21. The competition was close up to the very end, but two strong performers took top honors, deservedly so as the cream of the crop.

Elsewhere, Dragon's Lair continues to captivate and mystify players from coast to coast who have yet to master its intricacies and patterned play. Well, help is on the way as *Video Games* presents a very special strategy section devoted to this standout laserdisc creation. Beginning on page 42, you'll find not one, but *two* very distinctive approaches to success, guaranteed to get you to the last screen as well as with the most points possible.

If Q*bert caused a sensation in game rooms around the country when it was introduced, and even led to a Saturday morning cartoon show based on the now famous characters, so too has this game fueled the appearance of a number of spin-offs and imitators on the home scene. Keep a step ahead of the action by reading our feature coverage on page 28.

As for the news in home game development, check out our double-barreled profile of Xonox (page 32) and their novel attempt at making an impact in the marketplace, while Mike Katz, president of Epyx, offers some insights into the software design of this up and coming force in the industry (page 55). All this and more in March *Video Games*. Enjoy!

Roger C. Sharpe

VIDEO GAMES

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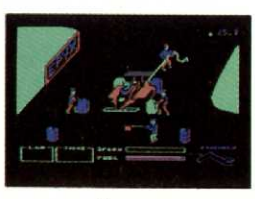

You'll never make Grand Prix champion just driving in circles.

You've got to stop sometime. The question is when. Right now you're in the lead. But the faster you go, the more gas you consume. And the quicker your tires wear down.

If you do pull into the pits, though, you lose precious seconds. So it's up to you to make sure the pit crew is quick with those tires. And careful with that gas. Otherwise, poof! you're out of the race.

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So what'll it be, Mario? Think your tires will hold up for another lap? Or should you play it safe and go get some new ones?

Think it over. Because Pitstop™ is the one and only road race game where winning is more than just driving. It's the pits.

Goggles not included.

One or two players; 6 racecourses, joystick control.

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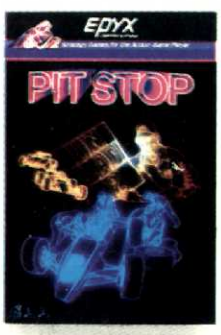


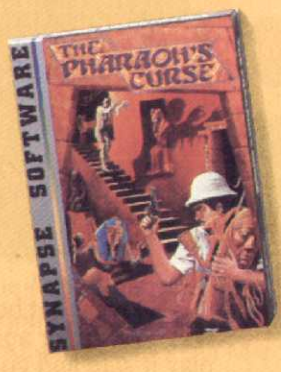
SYNAPSE EXCITEMENT

On patrol
Out of the sun comes your RAF biplane, loaded down with a deadly cargo of bombs and bullets. But watch out for the anti-aircraft guns and the enemy fighters—a hit could mean a tricky landing for repairs and ammo. **BLUE MAX.***

Ancient treasure
A fortune is yours for the taking. But can you avoid the ghost of Rama and the evil mummy? Are you nimble enough to leap the chasms and outsmart the booby traps between you and freedom? **The PHARAOH'S CURSE.***

Spellbinding
Only you can restore the forest through ancient spells. Then you must march your army of enchanted trees into battle against the Troglodytes and the evil Necromancer. Who will emerge triumphant from the final conflict? **NECROMANCER.***

Take the controls
Your helicopter mission—capture vital fuel and weapons, free the enslaved masses, and finally destroy the fortress itself. Will you triumph or be crushed by the fiendish Kraalthan lords? **FORT APOCALYPSE.***



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Maybe you've played pinball before, but not like this! No time to think, no room to make even one mistake. Just quick reflexes, light body armor and a whole lot of luck between you and the end of the game.
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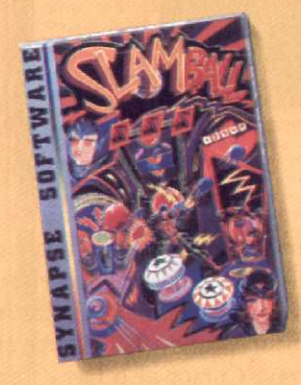
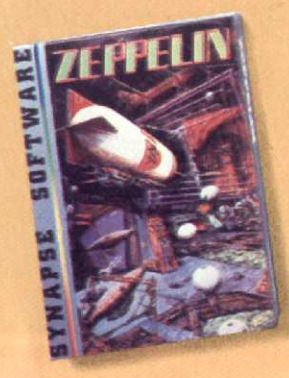
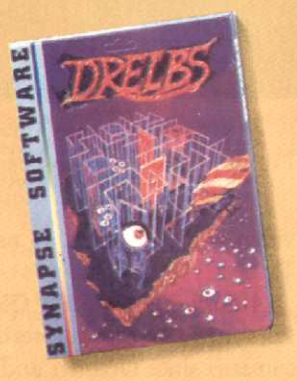
First the prison break, but that's only the beginning! The underground world of Zarkafir is full of surprises, from the lethal energy fields to devastating earthquakes. Can you defeat the Timelords?
ZEPPELIN.*

Flip-flop
Into this miniature land comes the evil Trollaboars, determined to take over. Their screwhead tanks will surely crush the peaceful Drelbs, unless you can defeat them on the atomic flip grid. **DRELBS.***

The Shadow knows
Deep in his lair the Shadow waits, protected by deadly Robo-Droids, Whirling Drones and Snap-Jumpers. Only the very strong and the very quick are ever seen again! **SHAMUS*** & **SHAMUS CASE II.***







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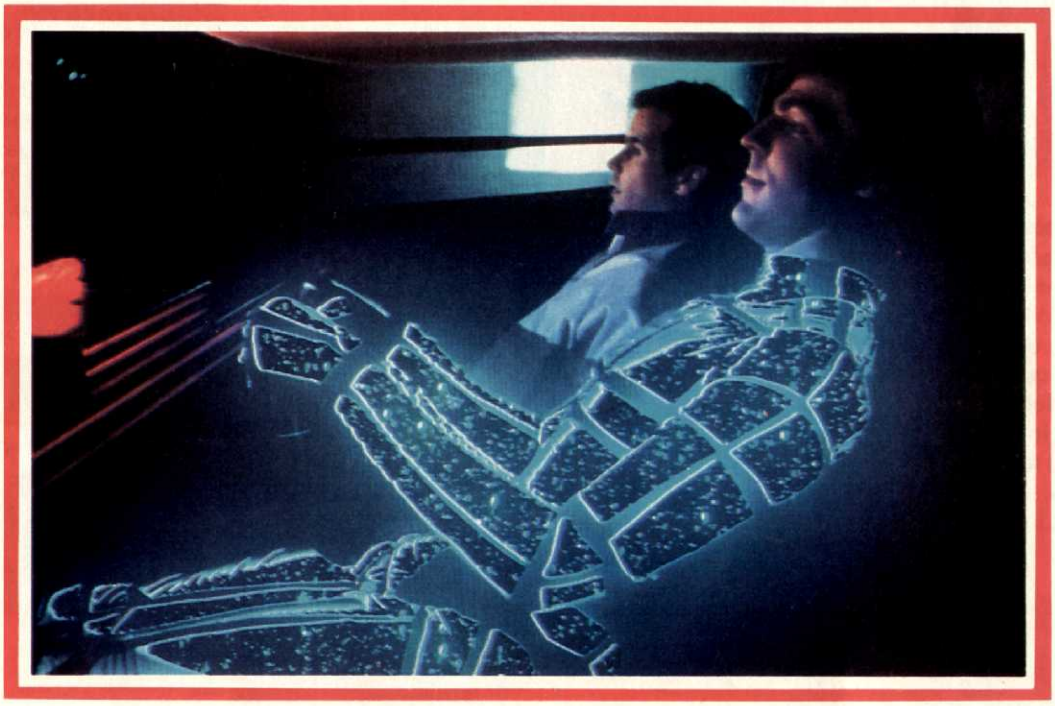
BLIPS

Automan: Solving Crimes From Another Dimension



Two criminals are hunkered down by a safe at a jewelry store. They are just about finished cracking the safe open when suddenly the room is bathed in a bright light. From nowhere appears a small, glowing object that happily dances about the room. Moments later, a glowing, blue man appears and quickly subdues the criminals, preventing a robbery. The pixie-like orb has already summoned the police and officer Roxanne Caldwell comes in to make the collar.

Something from a comic book? No. An escapee from a video game? Maybe. A new TV series? You bet.

Automan, created by Glen Larson, has been before the cameras since October and is readying several episodes for use as a replacement series on ABC. The network has high hopes for the series considering America's fascination with video games. Larson has a knack for knowing what's popular and in the past has created such TV series as *Alias Smith and Jones, Quincy, Battlestar Galactica* and *Buck Rogers.* He currently is producing the popular *Fall Guy.*

Having aired this past Dec. 15th the series, which ABC bought last spring, tells the story of a creature, *Automan,* coming from another dimension to ours and working with his "creator," LAPD programmer Walter Nebicher to solve crimes. But *Automan* is naive and almost childlike in his innocence. Nebicher and his police department friends must explain the facts of life to the translucent superhero and keep him from making dangerous mistakes.

Automan brings to this dimension a sidekick called Cursor, a small object that creates autocars, autoplanes, cold cash and whatever else is needed in the fight for truth, justice, and the American way. Cursor also has a perverse sense of humor and the production company constantly refers to him has having the personality of Harpo Marx and the appeal of Tinkerbell.

Desi Arnaz, Jr. plays Nebicher, the programmer who thought he created *Automan* for a home video game in his spare time. Arnaz is joined by a cast mixing veteran actors and newcomers. Chuck Wagner is the new-

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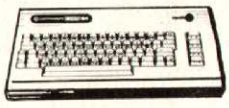

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BLIPS

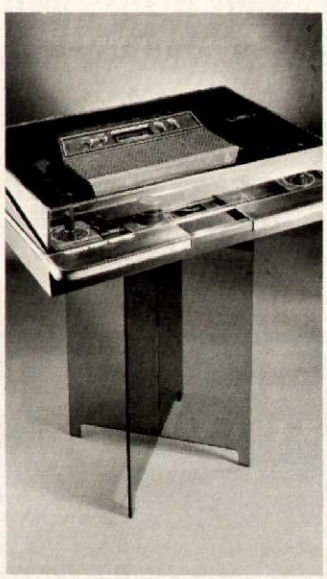
Camping Out

For children ages 9 to 18, who are all keyed up about computers, summer vacation can be a time to get on-line at five different camps around the country. Now in its seventh year of operation, National Computer Camps is getting ready to sign up interested youngsters who want to attend for one or more weeks during June, July and August. Under the direction of Dr. Michael Zabinski, a professor at Fairfield University, National Computer Camps offer a unique recreational and educational experience. Daily activities include everything from swimming, tennis and other sports, to small group instruction on TRS-80 and Apple computers.

Under the guidance of capable elementary and secondary level school teachers, youngsters who might not have any previous familiarity with computers, will be able to get hands on direction and instruction in learning computer basics. National Computer Camps are located in Simsbury, Connecticut; Atlanta, Georgia; St. Louis, Missouri; Cleveland, Ohio and Portland, Oregon. For more information and a brochure, just write to National Computer Camps (Box 585, Orange, Connecticut 06477) or contact Michael Zabinski at 203-795-9667.

—Ellen Cammeyer

Amazin' Case



Now thanks to an innovative idea from Mobile Video Center by Insight Concept Marketing, it's now possible to have a computer storage center that includes a carrying case, organizer and table all in one. This amazing case is able to store and organize a video game or home computer console, joysticks, paddles, power supply and cartridges in custom compartments while keeping wires connected and out of sight. That's not all this decorative device can do. Besides extending the life of the video/computer system by protecting it from wear and tear, it can become a table by attaching the smoke colored legs which are stored in a hideaway compartment on the carrying case. So, for those on the go, here is a traveling case for the video/computer system that turns into a table for use anywhere.

—Melinda Glass

Buying Spree

It wasn't that long ago that Bally Manufacturing Corp. shocked the coin-op world with the acquisition of a major competitor and industry power, Sega. Now Bally is ready to do it again with the announcement on November 30th of their intention to purchase Williams Electronics. Founded by amusement game legend, Harry Williams, in 1946, the company thrived over the years, but really struck it rich in 1980 with the introduction of its first video game—a true classic, Defender.

However, Williams was not immune to the slump in sales the past couple of years and received less than an overwhelming response to the products they displayed at AMOA. The still pending marriage between these two giants, and the as-yet-to-be-determined relationship they will ultimately share, if the FTC approves the plan, should provide for some interesting reactions and repercussions in the coin-op industry. As for the resulting products we might see in the near future, Williams has enjoyed a measure of success with its last few pinball machines; other amusement equipment, such as shuffle alleys, have been a staple; conventional video games continue to be strong; and then there's the company's new Discan creation, Star Rider. We'll keep you informed on what develops.

—Roger C. Sharpe

comer in the title role and is joined by Heather McNair who plays officer Caldwell. Lt. Jack Curtis is played by *12 O'Clock High* veteran Robert Lansing and he answers to the gruff but understanding Captain, E.G. Boyd, played by Gerald S. O'Loughlin, who has some experience dealing with rookies.

Behind the camera, many of the people who produced 1982's *Tron,* have signed up with *Automan,* which may explain certain similarities in approach. Producer Donald Kushner, visual effects supervisor and "Cursor choreographer" Bill Kroyer are the Disney vets who have taken the new superhero to heart.

Almost a dozen episodes have been readied with assorted storylines all involving the everyday crimes and fantastic climaxes one can expect from prime time superheroics. Episode titles are going to be fun if they all sound like "I'm Staying Alive So I Can Flashdance Fever," guest starring Mary Crosby.

—Richard Goodwin

All Aboard

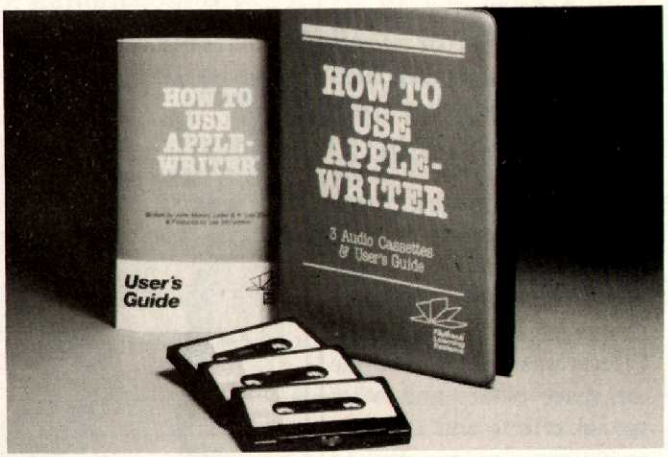
Looking to become *RAM* tough? Well, if you own an Atari 800 computer, Mosaic Electronics (P.O. Box 708, Oregon City, Oregon 97045) may have just what you've been waiting for. An addition to a new series of products, the Mosaic 64K RAM Select allows you to plug up to three boards into your computer for 196,608 bytes of useable RAM. Compatible with both 8K and 16K ROM cartridges, the 64K RAM Select is totally bus compatible for use with Atari 16K and/or Mosaic 32K RAM boards. And, as part of the package, all 64K Select owners get access to the 'Select' club which includes a monthly newsletter covering new applications for the board and a program library.

—Ellen Cammeyer

Lessons In Learning

Sometimes a little help can come in handy if you're trying to learn how to use a personal computer. That's what FlipTrak Learning Systems (999 Main, Suite 200, Glen Ellyn, Illinois 60137 (312)790-1117) believes and they've introduced a number of interactive audiocassette tutorials for a wide range of microcomputer products. Some of their most recent efforts include *How to Use Apple Writer* for owners of that system who want to learn word processing techniques at their own speed and convenience. There's everything from how to create files, to editing, saving documents and even printing them as learners use Apple's flexible word processing language (WPL).

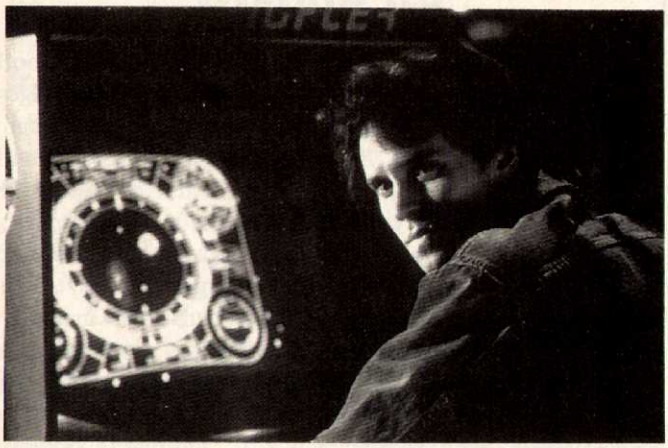
All that's needed is a standard audiocassette player and you're ready for three spoken-voice sessions which last for about two hours each. In addition, a fully indexed Operator's Guide is also included for a price of only $57. FlipTrack offers a similar package for owners of Franklin computers titled *How to Operate the Franklin Ace 100.* This tutorial provides step-by-step directions on how to use special keys and commands; load, run and save programs; copy programs and diskettes; and protect as well as modify any programs.



If you happen to own a Commodore 64 or TI-99/4A, you might want to check out the company's audiocassette tutorials for those system's which should be some welcome relief if you're having a problem or two in totally understanding all you'll need to know to get the most out of your personal computer.

—Ellen Cammeyer

BLIPS



Star Struck

Summer is the best time to go to the movies because the studios put out their biggest, flashiest and most exploitative products. This coming summer will be no different with the return of Indiana Jones, the Search for Spock and the coming of Supergirl. Yet, there is one breath of fresh air on the way in the form of a delightful space fantasy called *The Last Starfighter*.

The Universal-Lorimar production has been receiving little publicity since its announcement over a year ago, but by the time it opens on June 22, everyone will know that the stars are beckoning once more. This time, the story involves a teenager named Alex who is stuck helping his mother run a trailer camp rather than going swimming with his girl friend. Alex whiles away his time playing a game called *Starfighter* and keeps improving his score until, one fateful night, he tops the machine by rolling the points over.

Later that night, Alex is found by Centauri, designer of the game and intergalactic recruiter for the Star League, an organization of planets far, far away. Bewildered, Alex accompanies Centauri to the League's homeworld of Rylos where he finds out the game was really a training device, used to find the most qualified people to help the League oppose their mortal enemies, the Ko-Dan. After centuries of uneasy peace, the League's space wall is about to be overrun and Starfighters are needed for defense.

The League begs Alex to stay but he's more concerned about his absence from Earth and keeping alive. Centauri, ever the smooth operator, explains an adroid named Beta was left in his place with none knowing the wiser (or so he thinks).

Events escalate until Alex is left alone, to confront the Ko-Dan as the last Starfighter.

The $16 million production is the brainchild of screenwriter Jonathan Beutel, making his screen debut. Nick Castle (*TAG*) is directing with Gary Adelson producing, and all the design work, from aliens to spacecraft, is from Ron Cobb, noted for *Star Wars, Close Encounters* and *Conan the Barbarian*. Digital Effects was hired to provide the space battles and other special effects and they are employing a unique method to achieve their results.

DE is using a Cray-1000 computer, the largest, fastest unit on Earth to create the effects, and reports from early test footage have been overwhelmingly positive. If the effects work, as planned, this may pave the way for additional movies using computers for their effects fulfilling the legacy created by *Tron*.

Heading the cast is Robert Preston, the *Music Man* himself as Centauri, in a role Beutel says was written for him. Newcomer Lance Guest plays Alex and veteran actor Dan O'Herlihy plays the alien Grig who is Alex's copilot. Catherine Mary Stewart plays Alex's somewhat confused girl friend and Barbara Boson, of *Hill Street Blues*, is his even more confused mother.

Atari has gotten into the act by licensing the movie for an arcade game that will resemble the one played by Alex in the movie. No doubt if the game and film prove to be a success, a home version will ultimately show up. And, of course, there will be all sorts of other *Starfighter* merchandise to pick from including a comic adaptation from Marvel, a novel by Alan Dean Foster and the usual assortment of games and goodies.

The Last Starfighter, some Hollywood oberservers say, may be the surprise hit of the summer. So charge up your laser, practice your wrist movements and standby for another intergalactic adventure as our coverage of the movie continues in the months ahead.

—Richard Goodwin

Honorable Mention

When it hit the arcades in March, 1982, Zaxxon was an immediate hit and propelled the company responsible for it, Sega, into the video game spotlight. Well, Sega is no longer on the scene, having been taken over by Bally in the fall of last year, but their graphically stunning creation is still flying high—at least for home game enthusiasts. In fact, Zaxxon recently took top honors as best computer game in Eastman Publishing's Golden Disk Award competition. Based on a survey of software retailers nationwide, Scott Llewellyn, vice president of marketing (left) for Datasoft and Pat Ketchum, (right) Datasoft's president, receive their award from Jim McCullaugh, editor of *Software Merchandising* magazine, sponsors of the monthly competition.

—Ellen Cammeyer

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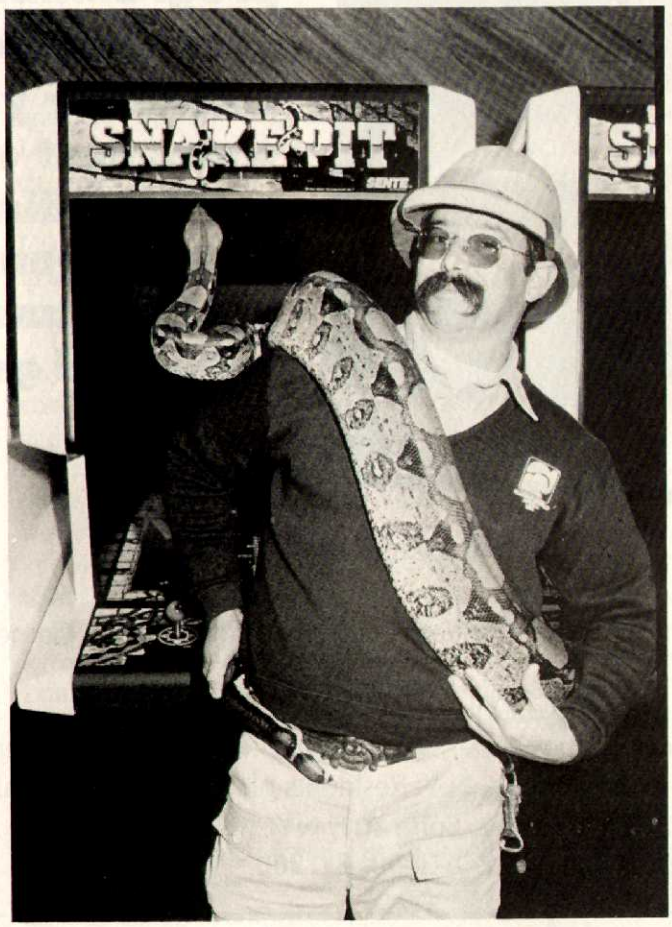
The Sente Solution: Snakepits and "SAC's"

Just as he promised, Nolan Bushnell publicly re-entered the video game business at 10:08 AM on Friday, December 9th. For weeks prior to that exact moment, Bushnell had teased people with advertisements featuring his picture next to a large packing crate wrapped in green ribbon. It looked like the crate might contain a new video game because it was just the right size for one.

But in the showmanship fashion that is Bushnell's trademark, the crate opened with a trumpet fanfare and confetti. Then, out of the box popped Nolan Bushnell himself. The originator of Pong and founder of Atari said he was out to "blow up the myth that what this business needs is another great game."

Instead, he offered members of the industry a new concept in the packaging and pricing of coin-operated video games. Players may not notice many of these changes, but Sente will be installing the SAC (Sente Arcade Computer) systems in Pizza Time Theater outlets and in specific territories throughout the U.S. during the beginning of 1984. Besides high quality stereo sound, the cabinets, or SAC game frames, feature the SAC PAC, a 14-ounce cartridge that contains the software to switch from one game to another. The SAC 1, which is the cornerstone of the "Sente Solution" includes cartridge-based games and the company plans to release at least four of those per year. In the near future, laser games and other technological breakthroughs will be offered through SAC 2, SAC 3, and SAC 4.

Photo by Cooksy-Talbott



The system is significant in that it marks a commitment by one of the prime movers in the industry to shift toward "convertible" games. Some manufacturers of coin-operated "game kits" such as Data East (the company which made BurgerTime and Bega's Battle), have been the main promoters of convertible-type games. For operators, this means they can have some respite from losing their investments into expensive "dedicated" or standard game cabinet games which may only be popular for a short time.

For players, the system will offer them more access to hot games when they initially hit the market. Arcades could run special tournaments in which all the SAC cabinets contain the same game. Players can also expect to hear much more about games as Sente plans to spend a significant amount of money on national radio and television advertising.

Sente, which celebrated its debut with a party that was complete with a brass band, elephants, camels and monkeys, also showed off its first game: Snakepit. Using an eight-position joystick and trackball, the player controls the movements of "Outback Jack" who fights snakes, spiders, scorpions and other dangers as he searches for the Golden Amulet of Alaron. To get to the amulet, Jack has to survive 13 waves of attack in six different chambers of the "Secret City".

In the preliminary testing of the game, top players were able to reach the Golden Chamber and retrieve the amulet. But the real trick is to then survive the next five rooms and escape with the treasure.

The Sente Solution may find that it faces the same challenge.

—Mary C. Blakeman

COMMODORE 64 · IBM PC
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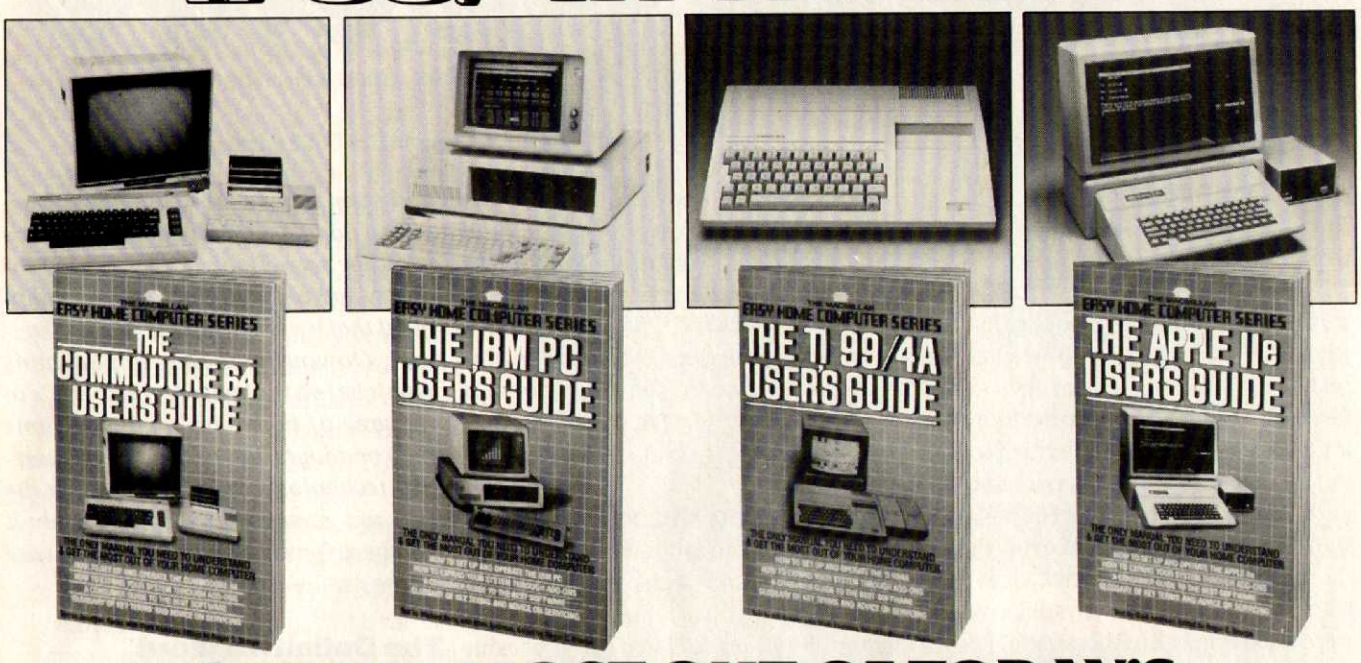

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Double Speak

Joystick Woes

First of all, I would like to thank you for using our joystick in your "Sweet Seventeen" article (November *VG*). But some of the comments made against our joystick I found to be somewhat unjustified, especially the part where Mr. Greenberg said, "It's almost like buying a car that looks like a Ferrari, to find out that it has a VW chassis and engine." While it is true that the basic design of Super Champ does evolve from the standard Atari joystick, it is also true for many other joysticks which were also reviewed in this article. I don't understand why Mr. Greenberg accused Super Champ exclusively. Besides, we have made much improvement over the standard Atari joystick design. First, we make the torque withstanding twice a high as the Atari joystick and we also have done testing to show that our joystick is strong enough to withstand over two million times break (all the test results are available upon request). Secondly, we also made the improvement to shorten the gap between the activating point and the actual switches so the responsiveness of the joystick is much much better than the Atari stick. I would appreciate very much if you personally test out this joystick again and see for yourself whether the review was justified or not.

Andy Wu
Vice President/Operations
Championship Electronics (U.S.A.) Inc.
South San Francisco, California

Perry Greenberg replies: My review was from a user's viewpoint not an engineer's. No joystick was singled out for adverse criticism. We have no axes to grind here at Video Games. *The opinions expressed in the article were based on general impressions when the stick was used a variety of games. I did comment that the configuration of the handle was an improvement over the standard Atari stick. I'm also pleased to see that my criticism of the suctions cups was taken seriously. I don't doubt that the stick could survive over 2 million times break but I probably could not.*

Outgrowing Video Games?

I am 18 years old now and I have recently entered college at Florida State University with a tentative major in computer science. Since I first became interested in video games about five years ago when I bought an Atari VCS my interest has never diminished. Since that time, I have owned and sold an Odyssey 2, Intellivision and I presently own a ColecoVision and a Vectrex. Both of these are back at my house and everytime I go to a store, I run over to the video game section to look at all of the new releases. Just imagine the pain I feel when I realize that I can't buy or even play any of them. My main contact with the game sphere is your magazine, which I have purchased since the very first issue. When I go home for vacation I plan on playing all of my games. But then I will have to leave them again and suffer until summer vacation. In closing I would like to ask the question that is on my mind, "Am I outgrowing video games?"

Dear Jeff:
Your concern isn't unique. Many others are feeling the same way. The problem could be one of not having a diversified amount of entertainment options when it comes to game playing. For the past few years we have been barraged by one video game and video game system after another. Many of the characteristics and themes have, unfortunately, been all too familiar and repetitive. But hope is on the way. Look at the coin-op industry and you'll find a wealth of equipment that is varied and highly challenging. Obviously, home applications won't be too far behind, whether it's in the area of high-tech computer game play or adaptation of the newest laserdisc technology. So be assured that the fun and games will continue—only it will be different than has been the case in the past.—Ed.

The Definitive Word

In your December '83 issue there were several letters claiming the Atari 5200 as the best game system. These letters all seemed written in a moment of anger, with many facts wrong, or not completely explained.

Nick Baime said that the 5200 would allow for 320 lines of resolution, but this allows for only two colors. One hundred sixty lines are the highest resolution used in any of the current games. Also Coleco's system has more sprite capabilities than the 5200. The 5200 technically has 192 colors, and only four colors can be on a given scan line. Star Raiders for the 5200 is the same as the computer version (a dinosaur compared to VCS games Star Master and Phaser Patrol) And Coleco has games licensed from Sega, Nintendo, Stern, Taito, Midway, Universal, Exidy, On-Line, Starcom, Fidelity, Venture Line, Century II, and Konami. And the wafer drive he mentioned was scrapped because of technical problems.

Andy Philips listed Star Wars as being available for the 5200, while Parker Brothers owns all home game rights, and are not planning any Star Wars games for the 5200. And all the games he mentioned as not being available for

ColecoVision, will (with the possible exception of K-Razy Shootout) be available formats.

Keith J. Moore mentioned the 5200 expansion port, but failed to mention that it has yet to be used. As far as hit-arcade games are concerned, how about Buck Rogers, Dragon's Lair, Frenzy, Subroc, Donkey Kong, and Front Line? And as for 5200 games not flickering, what about Defender, Galaxian, and Robotron?

T.J. Bennett says the 5200 will have a keyboard and voice synthesis/recognition module. The keyboard has never been announced and would be more expensive than the new 600 XL computer. As for the voice module, Milton Bradly is suing Atari over that system. And Coleco has several third-party software publishers, including Parker Brothers, Imagic, Microfun, Starpath, CBS, Fox Video, Sierra On-Line, N.A.P. (makers of Oddessy 2), and even Atari.

And Ron Galon's remarks about the VCS work-alikes, well, all I have to say is that Coleco is working toward a "standard game system," like the cassette tapes and record players of today. The Atari parts he mentioned were only used in display models used at electronics shows. Besides Coleco is paying royalties to Atari to make them in the first place. And finally, Coleco isn't making 5200 games because with less than a million units sold, it isn't a finally sound venture.

Some important points that weren't brought up by any of the letter writers are the fact that Atari licensed games from Namco, not from Midway, as Mr. Baime stated. The Atari keypad is not used to it's fullest extent (example: Missle Command could've had three ground bases), and the side buttons are not very responsive. Coleco games look more like their arcade counterparts than the 5200 games (look at Space Invaders and Pac-Man). While the most important fact seems to have been overlooked by everyone: The 5200 is an Atari Home Computer with no keyboard, fancy controllers, and costs as much as $70 more.

It's not that the 5200 is a bad system, but that the letter writers weren't very accurate.

Tim Abell
Conceptual Design Manager
TTI Game Software
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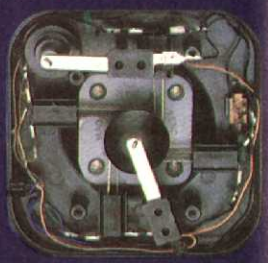

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VIDEO GAMES FIRST ANNUAL PLAYERS' CHOICE AWARDS

Well, the votes have all been counted and the results are finally in to determine the winners of *Video Games* first Player's Choice Awards. Your response over the months of the competition was truly incredible. In fact, over 200 different home cart titles and more than 90 different arcade games received some support in the tabulation.

If anything, the notion that game playing has lost some popularity in the past months, was at least laid to rest temporarily as you flooded the *VG* office with votes for your favorites that spanned some of the older classics as well as many of the newer efforts which have made their presence felt.

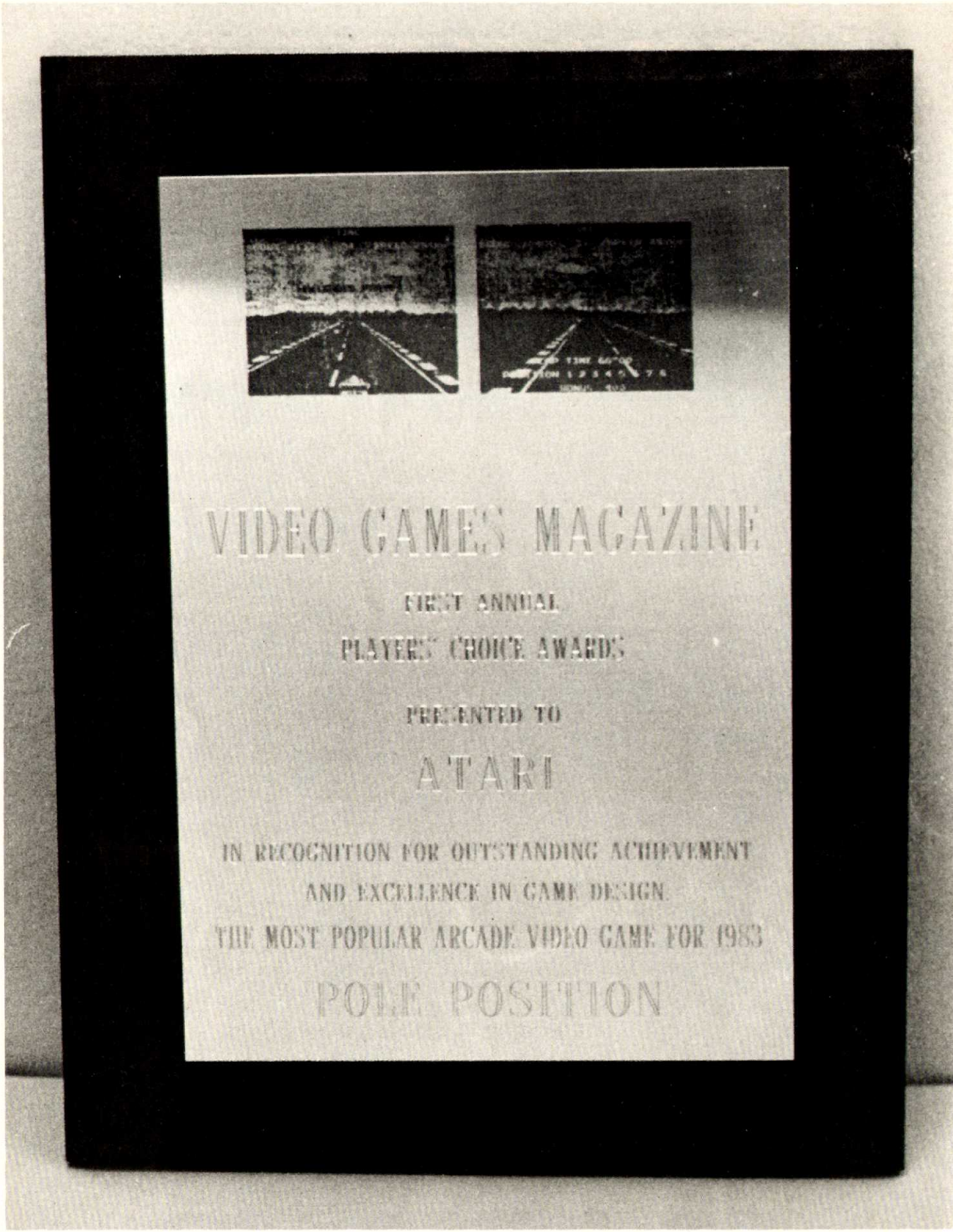
Interestingly there was no single entry in either category which ran away from the pack and dominated the voting. Even a noticeable outpouring of votes from Mountain View, California (a location that might be familiar to many) did very little to influence, differently, the contest in home cartridges. By and large, all of you, the readers of *Video Games,* tended to add credence to the viability of given design concepts compared to less effective scenarios or themes which fell far short of the mark.

With Q*bert being very strong, and some recent efforts such as Star Wars and Dragon's Lair gaining considerable support, Atari's coin-op sensation for 1983, Pole Position, was able to stay ahead and is the *Video Games* First Annual Players' Choice Award winner in the arcade game category.

As for home video entertainment, Activision's standout performer, Pitfall, held off the challenge of a close relative, River Raid, as well as Centipede, Donkey Kong and Donkey Kong Junior, while the adaptations of arcade heavyweights, Pole Position and Q*bert were gaining fast in the latter stages of the voting. So to Activision's Pitfall we offer congratulations as the *Video Games* First Annual Players' Choice Award winner in the home cartridge category.

To all the *VG* readers who responded in such overwhelming numbers to the opportunity to be part of the competition and vote for your personal favorites, we at *Video Games* would like to offer a sincere thank you. It was murder to count up everything, but well worth the effort.

—The Editors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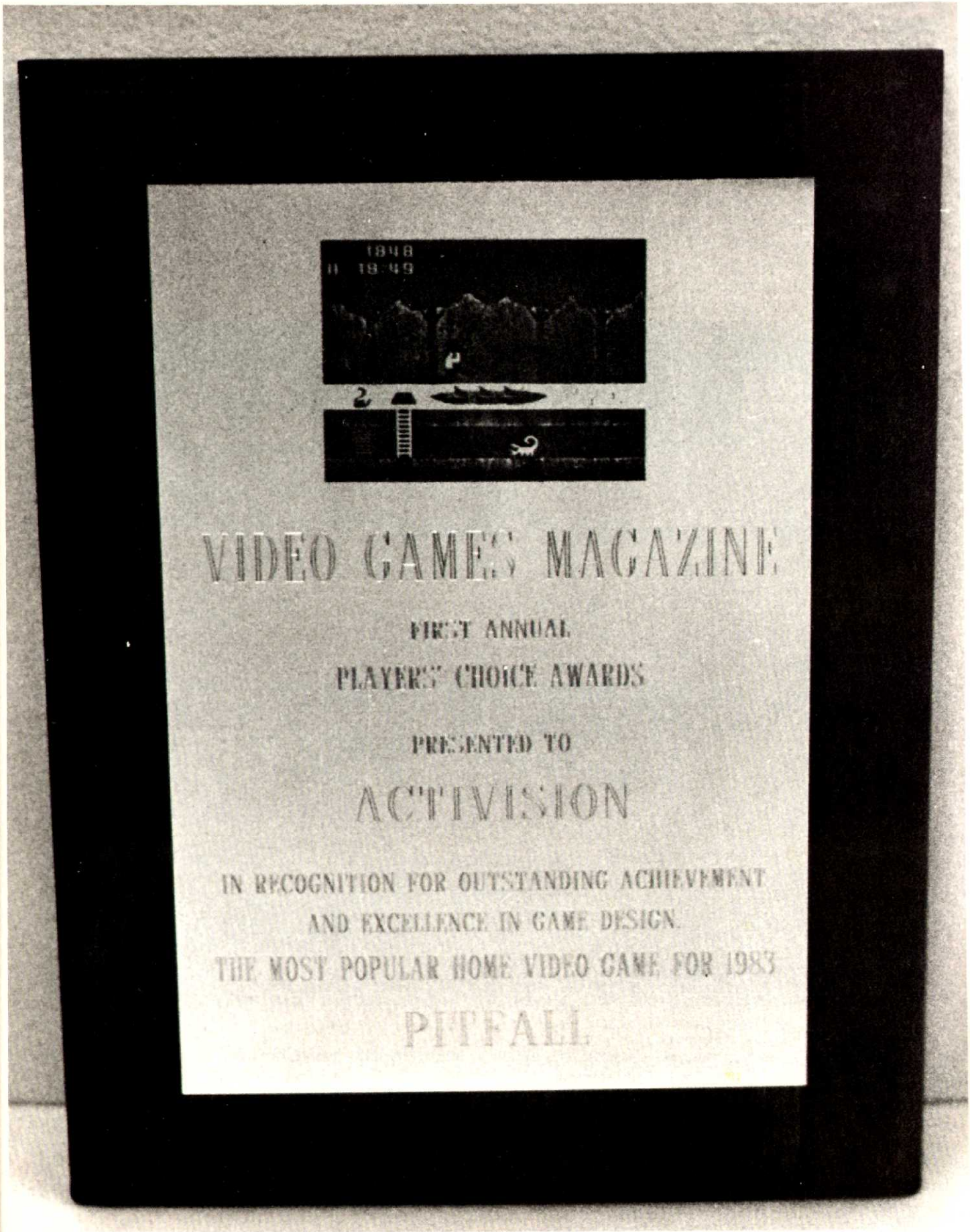
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THE MOST POPULAR HOME VIDEO GAME FOR 1983
PITFALL

TRACK & FIELD®

By Roger C. Sharpe

In October of 1978, Atari introduced the trak-ball action of Football and coin-op players experienced the most physically involving video game ever created. There had been a number of models, previous to this point, which had demanded a measure of dexterity and endurance, but none relied so totally on a player's ability to utilize strength and stamina.

The game proved to be extremely popular, however, rather than ushering in a host of imitators, the industry at large was beginning to focus more and more on the success of the movie *Star Wars* and the adaptation of space themes to video games. Atari Football was perceived as a novelty, an exception to the rule, and any widespread attempt at incorporating the physical elements of its appeal were quickly forgotten.

But now, what was once the norm no longer applies in the world of arcade games. After a long period of time when

ATHLETIC FEATS
Going For The Gold With Track & Field

product development seemed to mean more of the same old thing, the 1983 AMOA represented positive proof that the industry was once again ready to explore all the possibilities of just what coin-operated entertainment might be. And, although many were convinced that laserdisc games offered an immediate salvation, there was one conventional video which tended to stand out from all the rest.

One couldn't help but notice Track & Field and recognize that there was something special about it. On the surface, the realistic graphics, sound effects and theme weren't all that unusual. It was, instead, the play action of Track & Field which brought everything together in a very solid package.

A combined effort from Konami and Centuri, this isn't the first time that this tandem has struck it rich. On its own, Konami has been responsible for such coin-op classics as Frogger, Scramble, Super Cobra and Tutankham. Together, the two companies have enjoyed great success with Time Pilot and Gyruss. Now, in this Olympic year, comes Track & Field featuring six different events (or mini-games) in one game.

The intriguing aspect of Track & Field is that it integrates a variety of player skills from one screen to the next. Up to four players can compete head-to-head, or a lone player can go up against the computer in a game where you must continually qualify in order to go on. Each event offers a minimum goal you're out to exceed, with the extra incentive for standout performances being the chance to have your initials and accomplishment displayed on screen in a top three world record area.

With two widely spaced red run buttons, and a white button in-between for jumping or throwing, you have to master a rhythm and intensity to make the most of your efforts. The game begins with a 100-meter dash that's a test of raw speed and guaranteed to get your adrenalin going. A little official stands next to the track, with his gun raised. Time your start, beat the qualifying speed, and it's on to the next challenge.

The long jump poses an interesting combination of gaining enough speed by pounding away on the run buttons, while also knowing how to precisely time your takeoff before you hit the foul line and then pressing the jump button long enough to gain the necessary degree of lift that will propel you into the air and out over the side number markers. Once again there's a minimum distance you have to attain and three tries to do so.

The third event is the javelin throw where the same skills used for the long jump apply. The only difference is that you have less track to run down in order to build up speed, and the pressure and length of time you keep your finger on the throw button, will have to be longer if you want to get the height and angle needed to surpass your minimum qualification. You do get three chances to hone your skills, before it's time for something totally different—the 100-meter hurdles.

This part of the competition is a true measure of how well you can coordinate your hitting of the run buttons, for speed, as well as the jump button, for making it over the hurdles. There's only one shot at this event before you can relax a bit and rely more on sheer timing rather than physical power and stamina.

The hammer throw is fifth in the proceedings. Just press the run button once to get your video athlete whirling around and then time your hitting of the throw button to send the hammer on its way. If

at first you don't succeed, you'll have two more attempts to make qualifying and the opportunity to go for the gold in the high jump.

This last event requires you to only press the run button to get you off and running, while the jump button must be pressed to get you up in the air, pressed again at the appropriate point to set your angle and ultimate success in clearing the bar. There is the allowance for three faults as you inch your way up to a possi-

"There was a definite need to involve players more on a physical level."

ble record and more points, which have been tabulated along the way.

It's apparent that an incredible amount of detail and attention has gone into the creation of Track & Field. Everything from its use of voice, other sound effects and very strong visual images on screen, shows that the game has achieved what it was set out to do. Add to this the incorporation of an essential element of player interactivity and physicality, and it's easy to see why Track & Field stands apart from other coin-op attractions.

For the first time, in a long time, video game players have the opportunity to really go head-to-head in a realistic competition that tests different skills, in addition to how well you can 'pump' yourself up to stay in the action. All you have to do is walk by any arcade or game room that has a Track & Field to know what I mean when I call it something

special. The sound of hands pounding down on the control panel will reverberate out over the surrounding noise, while the usual throng of onlookers will be crowded around watching the competition. Because just as Track & Field is fun to play, so too is it fun to watch others try their hand at qualifying from one event to the next,or even make an assault on a world record.

A game such as Track & Field isn't created overnight (not that other models don't take equally as long). In fact, Arnold Kaminkow, president of Centuri, told *Video Games* that the initial planning and preparation were begun back in January of 1983.

"I knew that I wanted a multi-phased game, one that combined different playing skills," Kaminkow stated. "I also knew that I wanted a theme that was athletic and would tie in with the Olympics of 1984. There were many trips back and forth to Japan where the game was being developed in order to ensure that everything meshed."

When asked about how close the final product is compared to the original concept, Kaminkow is quick to reply that "I felt something was lacking from video games over the past few years. There was a definite need to involve players more on a physical level. I wanted them to be aggressive when they played Track & Field, not passively content to follow a prescribed pattern for mastering the game. In addition, there had to be a progression of events that tested different skills, with graphics that were realistic and sound effects that further integrated the entire machine."

Well, Track & Field has indeed accomplished this and more. At a time in the coin-op industry when most eyes were turned to laserdisc creations, this Centuri/Konami effort leads the field and should be around for a long time to come. In an attempt to add a little more excitement to Track & Field, Centuri is offering a special promotion package to willing operators which might just be the right kind of personalized touch to keep interest running high over the coming months.

The plan is relatively simple and begins with a poster you might be seeing hanging up on a wall at your local game room. On it are places to post high scores and the names of the players who have attained record levels. If you register the high score of the day, the machine will automatically display it and all you have to do is notify the attendant or owner on duty at the location.

Survive the competition of that given week and, if your score remains the highest for that period of time, you'll be awarded a "High Score of the Week" trophy, which Centuri will be providing to operators, and your name will be posted for the apropriate week. Then, if your score is tops for the month, you'll receive another trophy—"High Score of the Month"—and your name and score will be listed in a monthly high score category on display at your local game room. If your favorite spot has a Track

& Field already, or is planning to get one in the future, you might want to ask the manager or attendant whether they are offering this special trophy competition. Who knows, with a little practice, you may *really* be bringing home the gold...week after week and month after month.

Track & Field from Centuri/Konami: so far it's *the* game for '84, an attraction which uniquely provides both the 'thrill of victory and the agony of defeat'. On your mark, get set..... ▲

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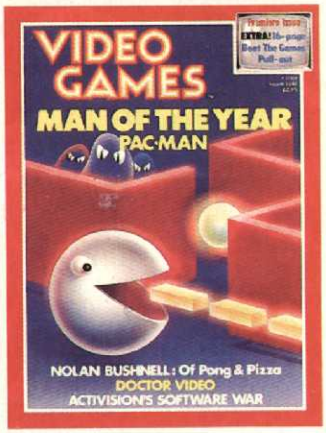

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Interview: Nolan Bushnell; Pac-Man; Activision; Home Computers; Reviews: Atari VCS, Odyssey²; Beating Coin-Ops

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Interview: Tim Skelly; Coleco; *Tron* Reviews; Intellivision, Astrocade, Dig Dug, Zaxxon; TV-game guide

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Ken Uston; Plimpton; Mattel; Bally/Midway; Atari; game programming; Atlantis; Pitfall; Caveman; Arcadia

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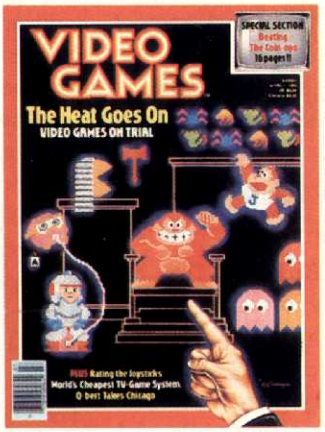
Bill Grubb, Dennis Koble; Donkey Kong; ColecoVision; Vectrex; DK Jr.; Q*bert; tip books; gift guide

FEBRUARY '83
Ralph Baer; video game movies; cable-TV; Atari 5200; '82 arcade scene; Special Section: *Easy Home Computer*



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APRIL '83
Jim Levy; Q*bert & Joust; Comsumer Electronics Show; Silicon Valley; EPCOT; Timex 1000; Ms. Pac-Man cart

MAY '83
Toy Fair; Video sports games; cartoons, comics & muppets video games; VIC-20; interactive laserdiscs

JUNE '83
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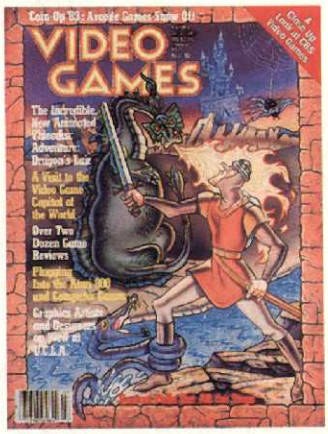

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AUGUST '83
Frank O'Connell; Hot arcade & home games; TV's video game quiz show; Computer games; TI 99/4A; *WarGames*

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FOLLOW THE LEADER

Spin-offs Jump To The Q*bert Challenge

By Mark Brownstein

It's a common story: Someone invents something kind of nice, and suddenly, there are many imitators—some cheaper, some better, and not always much of an improvement.

In video games it really got started with Pac-Man, and its dozens of look-alike maze games. Frogger and Defender were next. But now it's Q*bert's turn. Parker Brothers in all its wisdom has released Q*bert in many different formats: Intellivision, Atari, VCS, Atari 5200, ColecoVision, and Atari computers. Since there are now a multitude of Q*bert-type games for most major computer and game systems, we'll try to help you decide which one may be best for you.

First, what makes a game a Q*bert-like game? The way we see it, it's a game that involves jumping a character rapidly over a series of blocks, steps, spaces, or whatever the clever game designers can dream up. In most of the games the movement is diagonal (which causes a real problem, because the Atari controller set-up isn't designed to give diagonal signals), although some games conveniently make up-and-down or side-to-side hops necessary. In most of the games, some change occurs when a block is bounced onto, and when all the blocks are changed, you usually get a new game screen. Also, in most of the games, you can't just hop around—part of the challenge is avoiding some monstrous pursuer who is destined to get in your way and rob you of a chance to score.

Many of the Q*bert-like games suffer from the above described problem of poor controls. Another common problem is that the game playing machine often stores a few jumps in its memory before the jump is actually made. This may cause your character to keep hopping right off the screen, even though you stopped jiggling the controller a few seconds earlier. A game that provides good action, good sound, an entertaining game premise, and *good control* would probably be the ideal for this type of game. So let's take a look at just how close these games come to the real thing.

Atari VCS Games

Q*bert by Parker Brothers

This was Parker Brothers' first release of Q*bert in any format. And given the limited graphics and memory capabilities of the VCS, Parker Brothers did a pretty good job. The game has been out for quite a while, and has been reviewed in these pages in months past.

This version is pretty faithful to the arcade game. There are less cubes in the pyramid and pretty poor control. The loss of a Q*bert as a result of an inaccurate joystick is an often frustrating feature in this game. Also, depending on the television set you are using, (and possibly, whether you have a VCS or a ColecoVision adapter), you may end up with an annoying shadow of the Q*bert pyramid in the dark areas of your screen.

If all you have is a 2600, and you have to play Q*bert, this is a pretty good choice. Especially good when you realize that you can get it just about anywhere game cartridges are sold.

Boing by First Star Software

Of all the Q*bert imitators for *any* system, Boing has to be one of the most frantic. The screen consists of rows of platforms, one above the other. The object is to bounce your bubble through this framework, changing the colors as you bounce from step to step. The bubble must also be kept away from the needle, which comes down from the top and eventually jumps off the screen, in addition to the bubble eater, who slowly pursues your bubble. The needle can pop the bubble or disable the bubble eater, so it's often good strategy to lure the eater into the path of the needle.

One of the nice features of this game is that *you can't jump off the playfield.* Another nice feature is that the whole thing goes very quickly. You don't have to wait forever for your bubble to make its next move. The responsiveness to your commands is a very welcome feature of game play.

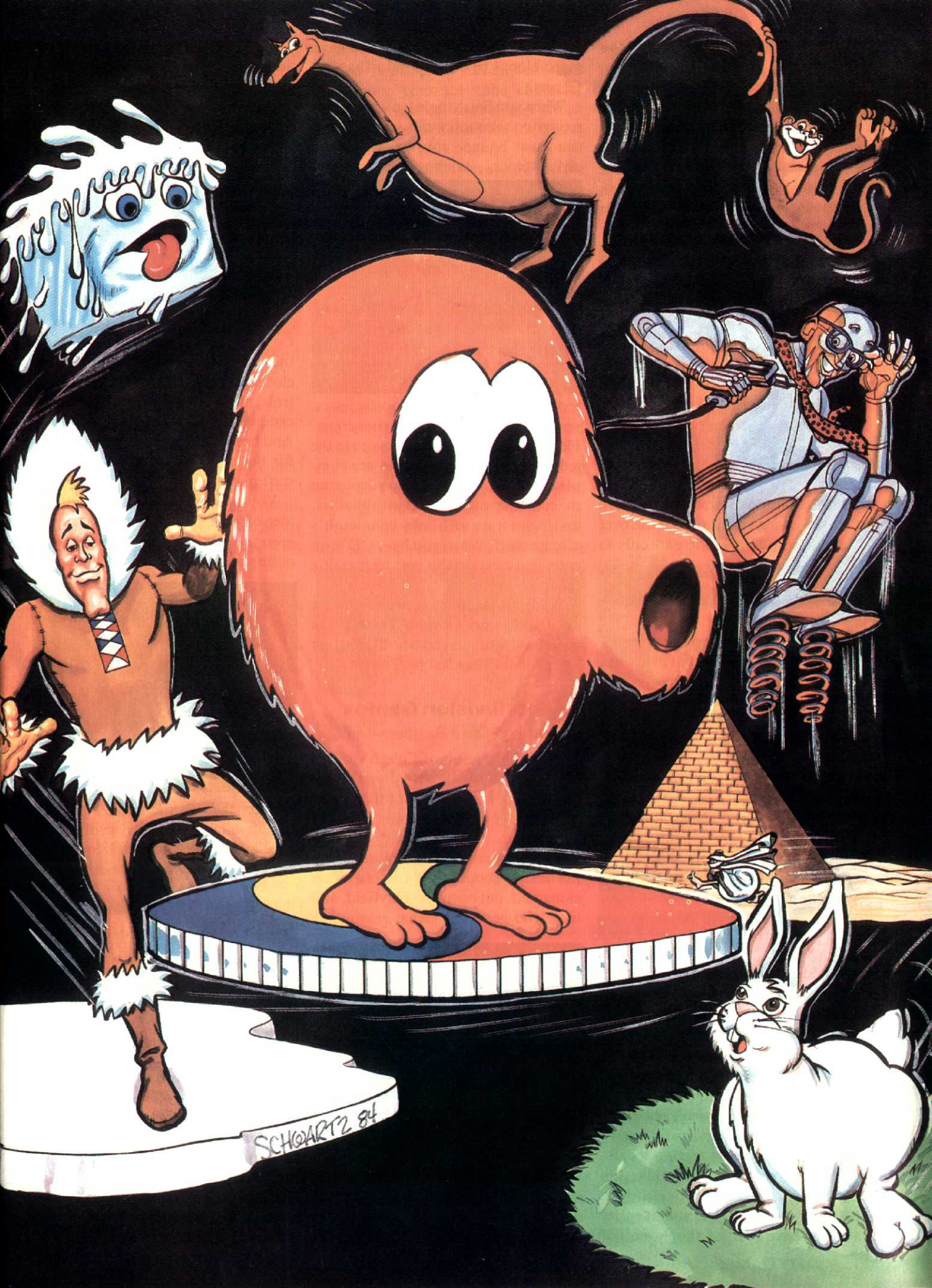
Unlike Q*bert, Boing is a one player game. However, like Q*bert, the game becomes more difficult as you progress from level to level. At higher levels, you must bounce on a square a set number of times—each time after that you alternately turn the square on or off. Getting all the squares changed requires a lot of strategy and rapid back and forth bouncing. Further along the game, you have to change the squares row by row. In short, Boing is a very well designed, enjoyable, and challenging game.

Frostbite by Activision

Frostbite is undoubtedly the newest of all the VCS Q*berts reviewed here. It is also the least like Q*bert of all those reviewed.

The object is to jump your Eskimo onto the ice floes which scroll from left to right and right to left across the screen. As each flow is landed on, another block is added to the igloo which forms at the top right of the icy landscape. When the igloo is completed, moving the eskimo into the igloo

Illustration by David Schwartz

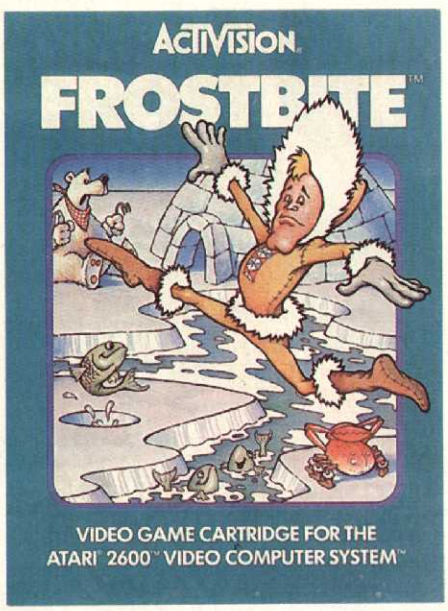

SCHWARTZ 84

adds a bonus, and advances you to the next screen.

In order to reset the floes, you must change all four levels. This makes many return trips (or good strategy) necessary. In this game you can only jump up or down; horizontal moves within a level aren't possible, although there is supposed to be some control of direction *during* a jump.

Making things more difficult than just hopping up and down are a few factors: First, there is a timer which starts at the beginning of each round. For each unit of time, the temperature drops. You must finish the igloo before your eskimo freezes. Also, you must avoid the snow geese, crabs, and other nasties who will grab you and push you off the ice. The only real bonus (besides the score for doing a quick job) is the fish which the eskimo can eat for extra points.

The fire button reverses the direction of the ice, giving you a little control over your pattern, although there are only so



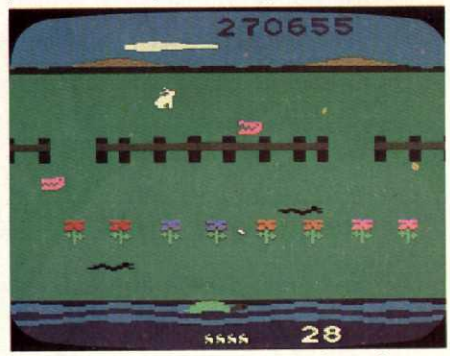
many chances to use it. With many levels of difficulty, Frostbite is an entertaining diversion for a while.

Rabbit Transit by Starpath

Rabbit Transit is a Supercharger game (this means that it only plays through the Starpath Supercharger). At fifteen dollars, the game isn't a bad buy.

In this game, you have two screens. The goal is to bounce around ledges, changing their color, while avoiding objects that threaten to drop onto you. The action is pretty fast, and at easier levels you have a turtle to bounce off of on the bottom. In this screen, you have more blocks to bounce onto than on Q*bert.

When you finish the ledge screen, you return to the country-side scene, where you must bounce your rabbit past a picket fence, avoiding snakes, but-



terflies, teeth, and other obstacles on your way to the bottom of the screen. Finishing the forest scene gets you to the ledge scene. Once the ledges are complete, you get a short cartoon depicting the courtship of the rabbit with another, and their return with baby bunnies. It's all cute stuff. When you have OD'd on cute, you can skip this part by pressing the fire button.

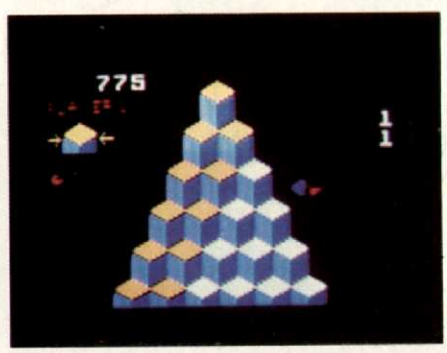
Since you actually get two somewhat different games, Rabbit Transit is a good buy. Most players who like Q*bert will probably like Rabbit Transit.

Intellivision Games

Q*bert by Parker Brothers

Probably a result of ColecoVision's KO punch of the Intellivision, there is only one Q*bert game for this system. It's Parker Brothers' licensed adaptation.

As we reported in past months, it's not terribly good. True, you get a rather elongated, but complete playfield, and true, you get a somewhat reasonable



feel of game play, but there's something that just isn't right about this game. The controls in this game aren't always very accurate, since all you've got is that little disk. Q*bert moves one jump at a time, so you can at least predict his next move fairly accurately.

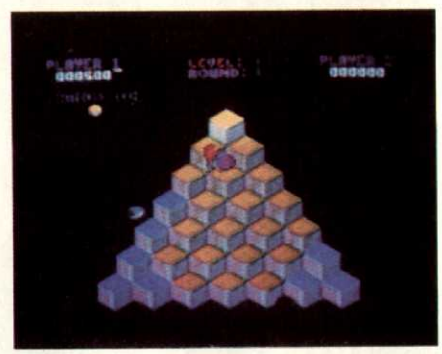
The constraints involved in designing this game for the Intellivision account for its funny dimensions. The small disk accounts for its funny game play. If you must have Q*bert for Intellivision, there's no choice—but before you decide, just try it out.

ColecoVision Games

Q*bert by Parker Brothers

Of all the authorized adaptations, the ColecoVision's Q*bert must be one of the best. The graphics are extremely close to the arcade game, game controls, although not as precise as the arcade controllers, are pretty accurate. And best of all, you don't have to wait for the game to load before you can start playing.

You even get a title screen, and an idea of what you have to do as you progress to a new level. This version is really quite good (this is some consolation for



the fact that it's the only Q*bert-like game available for this system). If you have a ColecoVision and like Q*bert, this version *will not* disappoint you.

Atari 5200 Games

Q*bert by Parker Brothers

For perhaps the same reasons there have been no look-alikes for the ColecoVision, 5200 or Intellivision, the authorized version is the only one available for the 5200. Although I don't like this version as much as the Coleco version, it does tend to grow on you.

The 5200 controller is, at best, imprecise. However, Q*bert responds a jump at a time, so you probably will be swearing less at this version than you might at its smaller 2600 brother. You also get a full assortment of pursuers, high-quality graphics and sound, and reasonably good game play.

As with the ColecoVision version, if you like the arcade game, you probably won't be disappointed by this adaptation. It looks alot like the original and

should save you a pocket full of quarters.

Commodore 64

Juice by Tronix

Since Parker Brothers hasn't (yet) released a 64 version of Q*bert, we can't report on its adaptation for this system. However, of the two Q*bert-like games currently available for the 64, this is the favorite.

The object is to bounce your character (Edison, looking something like a cross between a very old man and a rabbit) around the blocks that make up a circuit-board. Depending on the level, eventually a piece of the circuit will be revealed.

While you are bouncing all over, you have to avoid nohms and killer watts that dog your trail. Flash disconnects everything in his path (undoing your hard work), and Recharge "makes good things happen."

Arti Haroutunian, the designer of Juice, should be given a great deal of credit for the job he's done. He's built an animated title screens, increasingly difficult playfields, a deceptively difficult timed bonus round, and five difficulty options. Probably the only major problem is the inaccuracy of the controls, and a slight tendency to help you jump off the screen. On the whole, Juice is a well-conceived, well-executed, fun game.

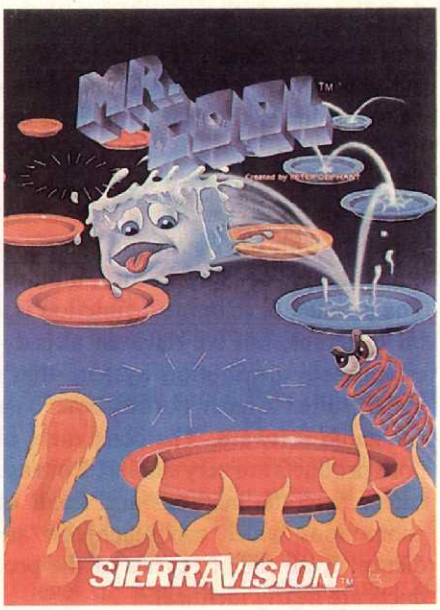
Mr. Cool by Sierra On-Line

Juice was available on disk (and may soon be a cartridge game). For players who don't own a disk drive, Mr. Cool is the only other choice. And since it comes on a cartridge, anyone who owns a 64 and a TV set can immediately play Mr. Cool.

Mr. Cool could possibly be nicknamed "Cube-ert," since the object is to bounce your ice cube character around a pyramid, each step of which changes color. When all the steps have been changed (this may involve a few hops on each block), you progress to the next round.

Complicating things in this version are the timer which keeps on counting, the fireballs which fly from side to side across the screen, and the hot coils (springs) that bounce off the steps from the top down. Contact with any of them causes a meltdown, which can be maddening, but is also fun to watch. Hitting the trigger gives you a few seconds of safety—you score extra points if you contact a now cool fireball or spring, and can move around the pyramid unscathed. The blinking on and off if the un-hopped-on steps is an interesting thing to watch (pushing the pause will show you how it's done).

Graphics and sound are very good, and you can't make your cube bounce

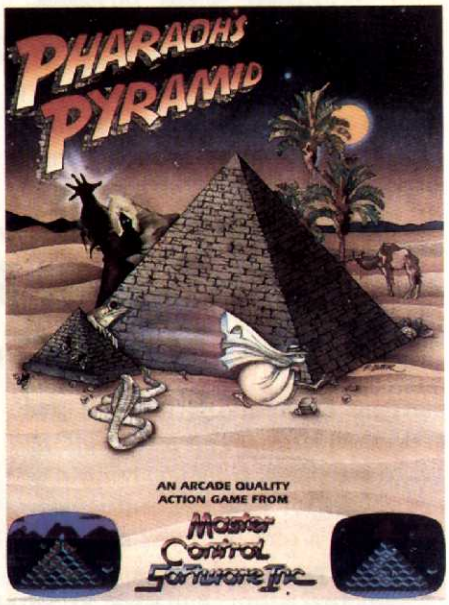


off the pyramid. If you want a game that's a lot like Q*bert in many ways, Mr. Cool is probably a bit closer than Juice, although I prefer the strategic difficulty and multiple levels of interest in Juice to the cold, unresponsive mechanics of Mr. Cool.

Pharoah's Pyramid by Master Control Software

Aside from Q*bert, Pharoah's Pyramid is probably the most like Q*bert of all the Atari computer games. It takes place some time shortly following Moses' escape from Egypt. The Pharoah promises Isis (with a shape that would make Hugh drool) to whomever can complete construction of his pyramid. Your character attempts this task.

Underneath the pyramidal structure are blocks. You must pick up the block and carry it safely to the top of the pyramid before you can get another block.



As you get the blocks, a structure slowly rises in the background.

The game is complicated by the various plagues and pursuers you must avoid in your quest to complete the pyramid. As with many of the other games, it's easy to make a wrong jump and take a nosedive off the pyramid. At higher levels, the attackers are many, and the steps required to make a complete change of the pyramid increase.

One level which should be mentioned is a built-in game within a game. At the completion of each level, (if you preset this function), a letter will appear on the screen. When you completely spell the word, you can send that word in with a receipt for the game purchase and get a free T-shirt. If that kind of challenge appeals to you, it's probably worth the trouble.

There are many levels of difficulty, and many stages to go through. If the idea of helping Pharoah build a pyramid sounds interesting to you, Pharoah's Pyramid may be fun.

For my money, however, I don't think that helping a Pharoah is all that important. I'd opt to go with either of the above reviewed games before I went with Pyramid. ▲

A DOUBLE PLAY COMBINATION Will Xonox Video Games Be K-Tel's "Greatest Hits"?

By Jim Gorzelany

K-Tel International, Inc., the successful purveyor of such "greatest hits" record albums as, *Summer Fun, Heavy Metal,* and *25 Original Polka Favorites,* is going electronic. Through its newly-formed Xonox division, the company is flexing its mammoth marketing muscle in what is, for them, a new entertainment frontier — video game software. In order to be able to stand out in an already-crowded marketplace, K-Tel/Xonox has introduced a unique line of "double-ender" game cartridges in a variety of software formats. Each release offers two completely-different 8K games, mounted at opposite ends of the cartridge, for about the same price as a single-game cart, approximately $24.95.

To get a better idea of just what we might be able to expect from this new entry into the home game sweepstakes, *Video Games* interviewed the two K-Tel executives responsible for the creation and development of the Xonox product line — Mickey Elfenbein, K-Tel Executive Vice-President, and Donald M. Thompson, Director of Product Development for the company's Consumer Electronics Division.

Video Games: The video-game software market is currently flooded with products and well-established companies are in trouble financially due to slumping sales. Why, then, has K-Tel/Xonox chosen to enter the marketplace at this time?

Mickey Elfenbein: Well, we saw that the selling of video games aligns iteself perfectly with the marketing efforts of our business—selling record albums. The product development function is a bit different, but we have an already-established distribution system that's ideally suited to reach our customer base for game software. The consumers of both products are very similar, from age category to the methods and kinds of promotions which can reach this audience. Even the life cycles of the products are nearly identical.

Xonox is a multi-national type of product that is both mass-producible and mass-marketable. There are sufficient profit margins built into the products that allow us to do our kind of extensive marketing. For example, we will spend about $2 million to promote each game release. Our whole marketing concept with regard to both records and video games is to produce selective, youth-oriented products, and do a big job on each of them, rather than market a whole bunch of small products and do a small job on each of them.

VG: What is the reasoning behind the "double-ender" video game cartridge?

ME: Our whole concept here is to offer the consumer a good price/value relationship. We think that each of these games is good enough to be marketed as an individual product. However, in order to break through from a merchandising point-of-view, we have decided to market two products together instead of one. This offers the consumer something that is truly unique. Like we say in our commercials, "Twice the fun for the price of one."

VG: Was the double-ender format the only way you could have successfully fit two games into one cartridge?

Don Thompson: There may be some new-generation computer chips out there that would allow us to have 16K of memory on one board, but we've elected to put 16K on two boards, 8K each. In this way, we can produce a product that features one game on each end and, basically, looks like what it is—a cartridge containing two video games.

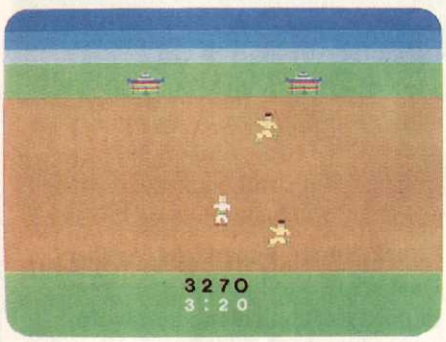
VG: How were the two games in each cartridge matched? What criteria did you use to decide which combinations to create?

ME: Many of our decisions were based on market research. By talking to potential consumers we found out which of our games they would most like to see as

being the matched-up products. Conceptually, what we have done is to direct the two ends of a cartridge toward a relatively-similar target audience. We aren't selling a product that might appeal to a five-year-old on one side, and a 20-year-old on the other. We want both ends of the cartridge to be compatible yet also to be different enough from each other in terms of the ways the games are played.

DT: Let me give you an example. Chuck Norris, Superkicks has a military aspect about it and features a great deal of male appeal. The same can be said for Artillery Duel on the other end. There are differences within the games, including the skills of how each are played, but the themes have common threads between them. In addition, the paces of both games are different, so that one actually serves as a "relaxer" after the other. This isn't to suggest that the intensity of one is that much stronger then the other, but rather that we're drawing on different skills or player response. There's a planned compatibility between both games in the cartridge. This makes it desirable to turn over and play the game on the other end of the cartridge, and vice-versa.

VG: In talking about the development of your games, there has been obviously

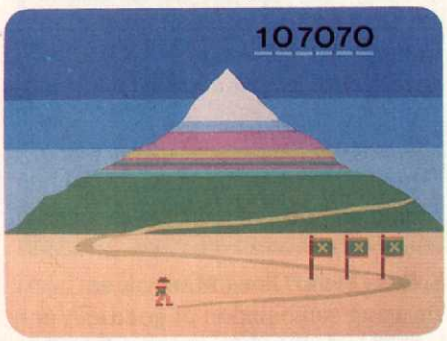


been a great deal of thought and attention into many details, did you manage to pull together a team of designers here in Minneapolis, Minnesota?

DT: No. Actually, the designers aren't located here in the Upper Midwest. We have people in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston, Dallas, Chicago, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Long Island, and Boston working on the products.

ME: In every case we work with design houses, rather than individuals. Each house usually has its own internal graphics expert, design expert, programming expert, and so on. We're not just going to one person and saying, "Here's an idea—do a game for us."

DT: Generally we first produce a script and storyboard based on the capabilities of the game idea. Then it's time to sit down with the programmers we're working with and start a dialogue. We also test the game ideas with kids, getting their reactions to the scripts before anything gets to a circuit board. Then, we fine tune the product in a kind of "round robin" manner—going back and forth between us, the designers, and the kids who test the games.



VG: How are you treating your game designers in terms of name recognition?

ME: We credit them in the instruction booklets, but not on the cover of the box or anything else as such.

DT: There's a great deal of input from a variety of people in the development of our products. Yet, the programmer has a certain amount of responsibility with regard to a game, but it's not his initial creation. It's a combination of talents. So the programmers do get credit, but it's not blown out of proportion.

VG: You're encouraging the players to read the instruction booklets before playing each game. Why the emphasis?

DT: In the early 2K games, such as Pong, you picked up the game and could master it before you even knew what it was all about. They weren't complex games. Now, we have brought a higher level of sophistication for Atari 2600 games, as well as the efforts we're producing in other formats. This means that, in order to really get into one of our games and play it as it should be played, you'll need to read the instructions first. Otherwise you'll die too quickly. When you have five to eight screens in each product, you're going to need some basic information regarding action and objectives.

VG: Two of your first games—Chuck Norris, Superkicks, and Thundarr the Barbarian are based on licensed characters. Will this approach to getting recognizable themes be emphasized in the future?

ME: We will always look for licenses that make some sense, both creatively and financially. When we find them, we'll certainly go after them. However, what we will avoid are licenses that, in themselves, have no relevance as far as the creation of a video game is concerned.

VG: You mean characters such as "Kool-Aid Man" and "Strawberry Shortcake?"

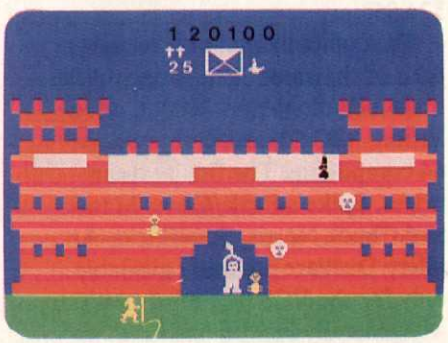
ME: Right, it doesn't make any sense.

DT: First, to make a game around Strawberry Shortcake really requires some ingenuity. Second, the target audience for the video game must be the same as the target audience for the licensed character. The Strawberry Shortcake character is aimed at an age group that is totally different from the typical age group of kids who play video games.

ME: Now, on the other hand, the Thundar the Barbarian character itself fits into a storyline that is ideally suited to a video game. The same for Chuck Norris. In addition, go into a junior high school and most kids know who Chuck Norris and Thundarr the Barbarian are. However, licensed characters aren't going to be the sole emphasis of our product development.

VG: How difficult was it for you to obtain these two licensing agreements?

ME: The Chuck Norris people were terrific to work with. They recognized that the product would do well, we would do



well, and that they would do well. Chuck approved our storyboard, helped us with research, saw the game about 50 percent of the way through and approved what we were doing.

Ruby-Spears, who owns Thundarr the Barbarian was easier to work with in this particular project than they have been with regard to other characters. For a while, there were hordes of people

(Continued on page 36)

Xonox Video Games: Twice the Bang and Then Some

The Xonox multiple-game cartridge format is, in itself, not particularly innovative. Many of the original Atari 2600, Odyssey², and Intellivision releases offered two or more games that were hammed into a single ROM chip under the guise of "more bang for the buck." Unfortunately, due to the technical limitations of these early efforts, the consumer usually had more fizzle than bang to show for his or her video game dollars.

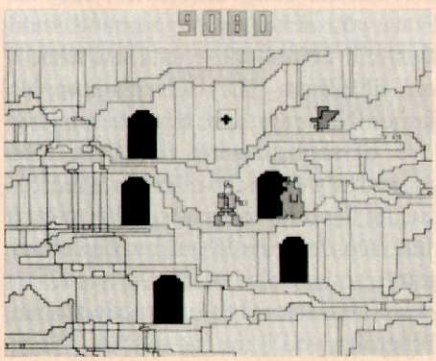
However, what *is* particularly innovative about the Xonox "double-ender" product line is the manner in which the company has successfully combined state-of-the-art technology with enhanced consumer value. The result is a product that features two completely different games that are positioned, independently, at opposite ends of the cartridge.

Each game runs off of its own 8K memory and provide brilliant graphics and challenging, multi-screen game play. Both games together have a combined memory equal to, or greater than, the memory capacities of many personal computers, and retail for roughly the same price as a single-game 2K or 4K cartridge—$24.95.

The company plans on releasing each of the games in a variety of formats including Atari 2600, ColecoVision, VIC-20, and Commodore 64-compatible. The first two cartridges, Spike's Peak/Ghost Manor and Chuck Norris, Superkicks/Artillery Duel are presently available only for the VCS (the other versions will generally lag the Atari 2600 releases by a month or so): The next two Xonox offerings, Robin Hood/Sir Lancelot and Thundarr the Barbarian/(teamed with a game to be named later), will be released in all formats in the spring. What is interesting and maybe a surprise to many skeptical video enthusiasts is that every Xonox game tested thus far could stand alone. The games play well with graphics that fully utilize the capabilities of each machine. In fact, there are enough subtleties in each game to keep you interested for repeat play and the instruction booklets are informative as well as necessary reading before playing the games to avoid early and repeated deaths. The final point about Xonox so far is that the two games on each cartridge have been matched with care.

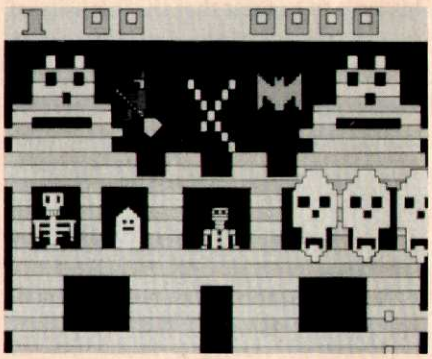
Here's a brief look at what you can expect from the first four Xonox cartridges (all were tested in Atari 2600 format only, except where mentioned otherwise).

Spike's Peak/Ghost Manor is an engaging combination of good-looking, challenging contests. In Spike's Peak, you are the title explorer who must scale five different game screens in order to reach the top of a formidable, yet unnamed mountain. Only fast reflexes and a good sense of timing will allow you to avoid the menaces who dwell on the mountain. These include hungry bears, vicious eagles, poisonous cacti, sudden rock slides, flying boulders, perilous avalanches, and the ever-ferocious abominable snowmen. You must reach the top and plant your flag before you either freeze to death or run out of lives, whichever comes first. Despite its initial Donkey Kong



resemblances, it's an original video ordeal that is *not* easy to master.

In Ghost Manor, you can choose whether you want the hero of the game to be a boy or a girl (by means of the 2600's color/black-and-white switch), thus making it the world's first, truly non-sexist video game. You must rescue your friend (of the sex opposite from the one you choose to be) from the clutches of the bloodthirsty Count Dracula. Drac has imprisoned your friend on the top floor of the castle. To save your buddy, you must: 1) play tag with a friendly ghost in a graveyard in order to obtain bullets; 2) shoot a series of moving targets at the castle entrance while avoiding an axe-wielding mummy; 3) work your way through two floors' worth of maze-like rooms while you search for crosses; and 4) use the crosses to force Dracula into his own prison while you escape with your

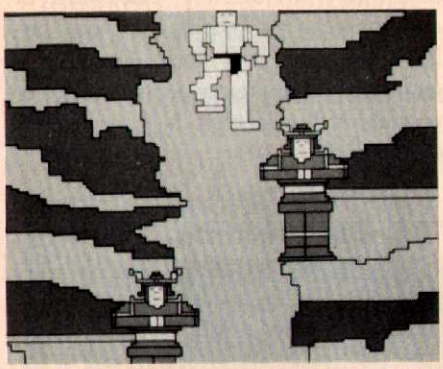


comrade, post-haste. Oh yes, the whole process must be completed succesfully, without losing a life, within four minutes. Actually, it's the easier of the two games in the cartridge, and it's still no piece of cake, especially at advanced difficulty levels.

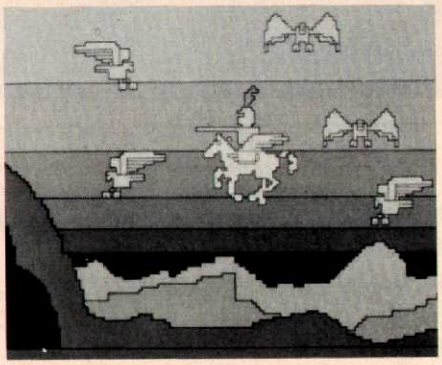
Chuck Norris, Superkicks/Artillery Duel are two military-themed games. In one, you control modern weaponry while, in the other, you battle in the style of medieval Japanese warriors. In Chuck Norris, Superkicks, you are the kung-fu master who must fight—hand-to-hand or, in some instances, foot-to-foot—in six screens filled with skilled martial arts opponents. The idea here is to progress from a white belt to a black belt karate expert as you knock off your foes and make your way through horizontally-scrolling trails (many of them dead-ends) in order to reach a distant monestary. There you must battle the much-feared ninja warrior for the life of a companion held cap-

tive by your enemy. It's an involved, challenging intense affair, with many intricacies built in.

Artillery Duel is almost passive by comparison with Chuck Norris (and is probably the weakest of all the Xonox games previewed thus far). But that's okay—after Superkicks, your thumbs will need the rest. In this two-player game, you and your opponent control cannons positioned at opposite ends of a randomly-selected mountain setting. You each select an appropriate cannon angle and gun powder load, given an ever-changing wind factor. The object is to blow your adversary out of existence in as few shots as possible. Alas, Artillery duel is little more than a dressed-up, two-player version of Atari's old Human Cannonball release. The Atari 2600 format graphics aren't much to look at, but the ColecoVision version we were shown was lavishly illustrated. Again, an amusing, though not totally engrossing game that can somehow be both passive and violent at the same time.



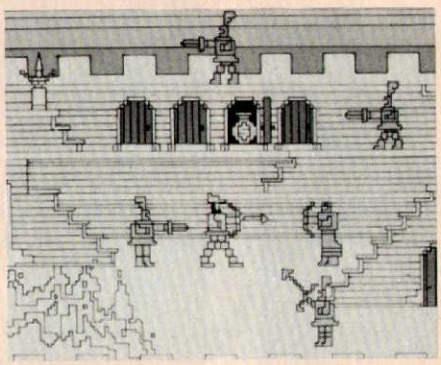
Robin Hood/Sir Lancelot teams two medieval-theme games that feature non-stop action and impressive graphics. In Robin Hood, you're the famous hero who must save the fair Maid Marion from the evil Sheriff of Nottingham while robbing the Sheriff of his gold and giving it to the poor, yet humble, people of Sherwood Forest. To do so, you must first shoot eleven of the Sheriff's sneaky henchmen in the forest near Nottingham Castle with your trusty bow-and-arrow. Next you proceed to the castle itself, kill the Sheriff's guards, and sneak into the castle before the drawbridge slams shut. Once inside the castle, you must search two floors' worth of locked rooms for either the gold or the girl. If you find either, you're victoriously transported back to the forest, where you get to do it all over again at a higher level of difficulty. However, if you open a door and find one of the Sheriff's henchmen waiting, the battle just begins. Overall, a fine game that



stays true to the original Robin Hood storyline.

Sir Lancelot, on the other hand, is an entertaining game that somehow avoids the original "Knights-of-the-Roundtable" storyline altogether. In each of four odd-numbered screens, you control Sir Lancelot who flies through the air while riding Pegasus, the winged horse (who must have gotten lost somewhere North of Greek mythology), and fights hordes of flying-insect enemies.

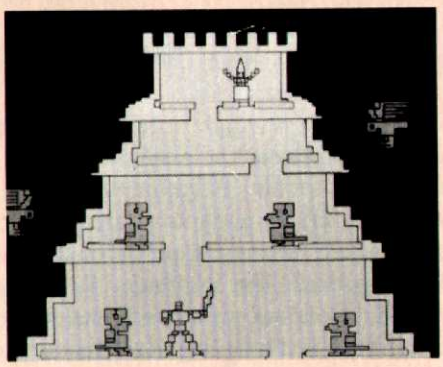
In each of the four even-numbered screens (which you reach by successfully killing your foes in the odd-numbered screens and vice-versa), you must lance a fireball-dropping dragon who patrols the top of the screen to complicate matters, you



must do this before a rising lava pit threatens the life of your Lady Fair, whom the dragon has seen fit to capture. While it's not as amusing or engaging as Robin Hood, Sir Lancelot is packed with plenty of action. What's more, the Joust-like wing-flapping action of the flying horse requires quick, precise joystick- and-firebutton control in order to obtain precise movement around each screen.

Thundarr the Barbarian will be teamed with another game to be named at a later date, before its early 1984 release. Thundarr itself, however, is an exciting game that provides a new twist to the standard action/adventure game format.

The game's storyline is faithful to the basic premise of the popular Saturday morning cartoon program of the same name. You, as Thundarr, must rescue the Princess who has been captured by the evil man-ape, Ariel. To free her, you must first find your trusty sun sword that has been hidden in one of nine rooms, spread over three levels in Ariel's lair. Along the way you must avoid contact with



legions of slimy rats that are so vicious they'll even climb the walls to get you if you're perched atop a ledge!

Once you find the sword you must proceed to the fourth level and release the captive Princess. However (and here's where the twist comes in), throughout the action, the Princess is attacked by a vampire bat which you'll hear screeching as it enters the Princess' prison chamber. When this occurs, you must pull down on the joystick and switch the game perspective to the Princess' jail cell. There, you must control the Princess as she fights off the bat by throwing killer light beams at it. Better be quick about it, though—while this is taking place Thundarr is left unprotected and is vulnerable to the rats. Hopefully Xonox's eventual "B" side to this involving contest will be as exciting as Thundarr.

—Jim Gorzelany

Xonox

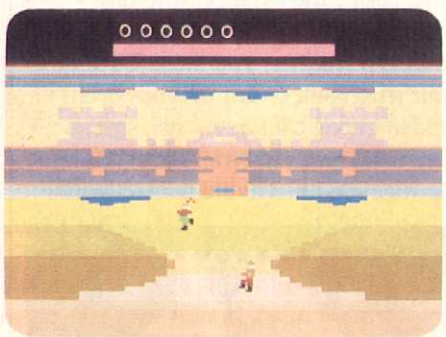
(Continued from page 33)

after these same two licenses. It was a case of supply-and-demand. The people who marketed these two characters to us may have asked for more money than they would have been able to do otherwise, based on the demand.

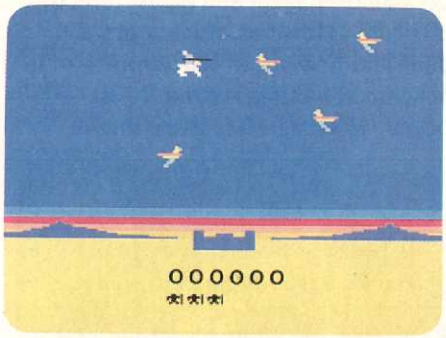
VG: What about the arcades? Are you pursuing arcade game licenses?

DT: Yes we are, and we would be very happy to license our products to the arcade game manufacturers.

ME: Actually we *are* looking to license



some of our games to the arcade people. We are also looking to license the games to outside software manufacturers who can produce versions of our products in other formats. For example, Spike's Peak/Ghost Manor will be released in a number of formats other than the ones we are manufacturing ourselves (Atari 2600, ColecoVision, VIC-20, and Commodore 64). The games will probably be available for the Apple, Atari compu-



ters, and the new IBM "Peanut." These formats would not be cost-effective for us to produce ourselves, so we license the games to third-party software companies who can reach that part of the market and show profit in doing so.

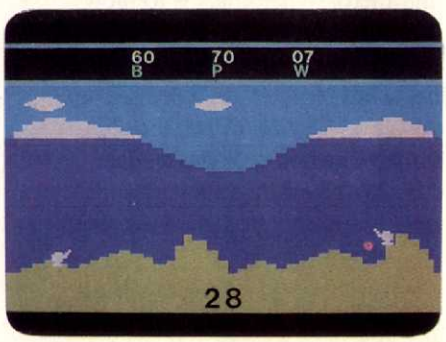
VG: What about the other way around—producing home versions of successful arcade titles?

ME: Yes, we would be interested in acquiring arcade-game licenses. Once again, however, they would have to meet the two criteria we have in this area. Obviously, if they are *successful* arcade games, this would meet one of the criteria. However, the financial part—the potential return on investment—may not be sufficient to warrant what is being paid for successful arcade-game licenses these days.

VG: What is on the horizon for Xonox and what can we look for in the future?

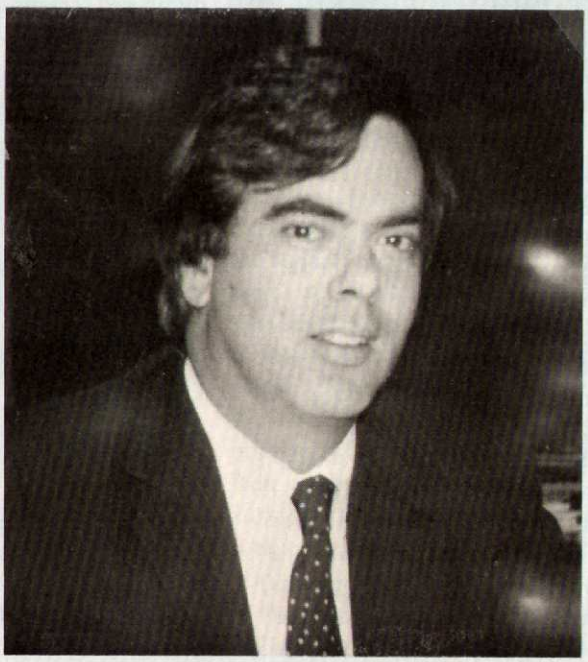
ME: We'll continue to concentrate on entertainment kinds of products. We'll follow the market in terms of creating software that best serves the established audiences. By continuing to release games in a number of formats, we can produce a limited number or releases and yet do a big job on each of them.

DT: And again, we're following closely the record business. We release records, 8-tracks, and cassettes, just as we are releasing Atari, Coleco, and Commodore versions of each of our video games.



ME: Our plan is not to be on the leading edge—to provide new hardware or create a market. Our plan is to be an early follower of consumer preferences in game and computer systems in order to provide software that best serves the marketplace.

Mickey Elfenbein



Don Thompson

COIN-OP SHOP

Contenders and Pretenders for '84

By Jim Gorzelany and Steve Harris

Of the new video games reviewed this month, all fall neatly into one of three "classic" coin-op formats: Sports, space, and novelty games. However, you'll find that, even at their worst, they're not just the same old games. New computer and laserdisc technologies are being used in innovative ways, thanks to a refreshingly welcome measure of creative ingenuity.

Astron Belt, now being offered by Bally, for example, goes far behond the normal space shoot'em-up by incorporating interactive laserdisc-generated special effects footage. Bega's Battle for Data East, on the other hand, is a space game that uses its laserdisc effects to give a complex storyline to an otherwise ordinary slide-and-shoot contest.

In the sporting arena, Centuri/Konami's Track & Field brings a pronounced level of physicality, lacking for so long in coin-op video, with a multi-game event scenario.

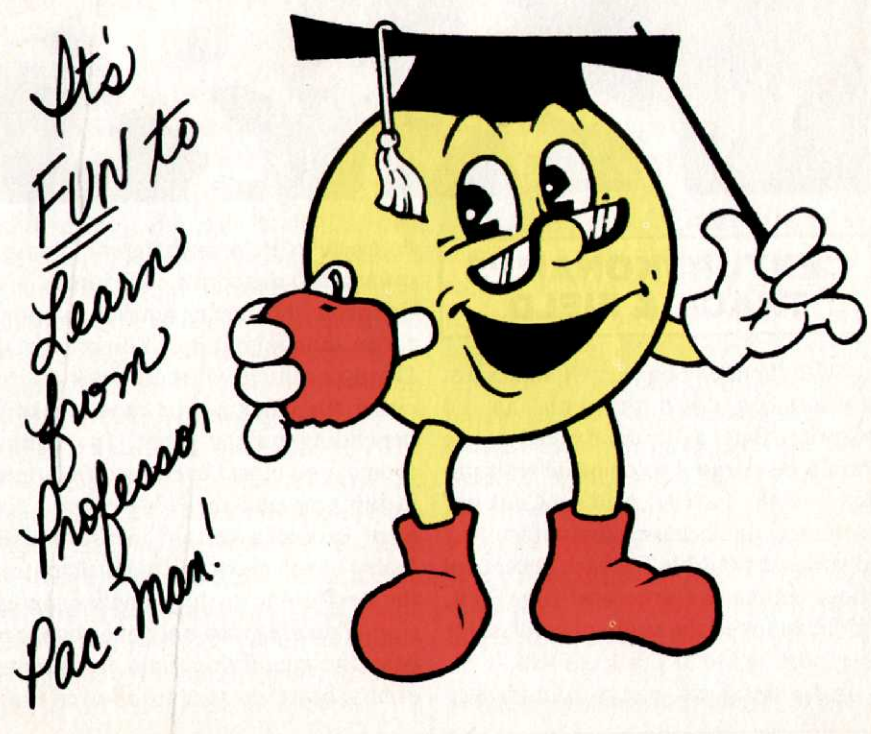
Novelty "quiz" games, such as Exidy's Fax, seem to be making a comeback in the coin-op world. The latest entry in this category employs brilliant graphics to illustrate abstract questions. The questions here are asked by a certain round, yellow video-game character who shall, for the time being, remain nameless.

At this point, it's clear that the slick new laserdisc games are bringing players back into the arcades after a much-publicized drought. It's also apparent to the game manufacturers that only a steady supply of diverse, clever and original new games will keep them there. Rehashes, copies, and clones of other machines need not apply. The business will survive and thrive only on a continuing diet of technology and innovation.

BALLY/MIDWAY'S PROFESSOR PAC-MAN

Can this really be the fifth coin-op sequel to, or spin-off of, the original Pac-Man game? After Ms. Pac-Man, Mr. and Mrs. Pac-Man, Baby Pac-Man, and Super Pac-Man (not to mention a Pac-Man Plus speed-up kit, countless Pac-paraphenalia items, and a Saturday morning cartoon program), you'd think the video gaming public would have had enough of the little yellow dot-chomper, right?

Apparently not. At least the folks at Bally/Midway, the holders of Pac-Man's American interests, don't seem to think so. So now we have Professor Pac-Man, a video game that is literally Pac-Man in name only. It is not a maze game and has absolutely nothing to do with the original concept of what has



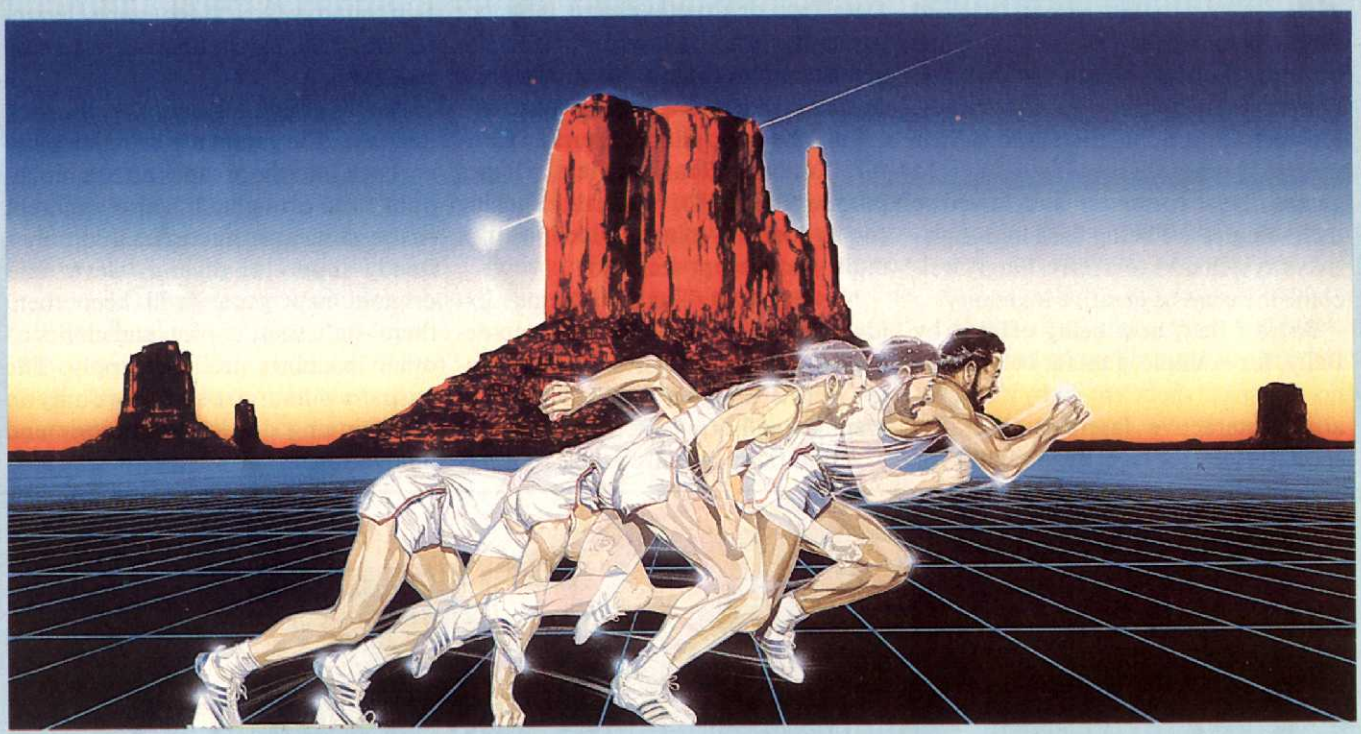
become so universally recognizable. Nowhere does Professor Pac-Man even allude to running through a maze while avoiding ghosts and eating power dots.

So, what is it? Believe it or not, it's a video version of an IQ test, proctored by none other than Pac-Man himself, decked out in full professorial regalia at the top of the screen. Professor Pac-Man asks three-answer, multiple-choice questions that test your powers of recall, perception, and abstract reasoning, among others.

Each time a question is presented on the screen, a little Pac-Man chomps down a line of dots from left-to-right near the top of the screen. This acts as both a time clock and scorekeeper for each question. You must correctly answer each question (by pressing one of three buttons) before Pac-Man eats his way to the right side of the screen. The quicker you answer a question (you generally get two chances to do so), the more points you will score. If you completely miss a question, the game is over. Answer enough questions correctly, and you will be given a more difficult bonus question for extra points.

In all fairness, the questions presented in the game are not all that simple. They can get downright tricky at times. Also, the graphics used to illustrate each question are interesting and amusing. Bally/Midway's programmers have obviously put a great deal of time into developing the visuals for Professor Pac-Man. The problem is, they should have spent more of that time programming additional questions into the machine. In only four games' worth of Professor Pac-Man, I had at least two questions come up a second time as repeats.

As a novelty game in general, Professor Pac-Man is mildly amusing, and is worth plunking a quarter into every now and then to flex the old mental muscle. However, as a Pac-Man derivative, it just doesn't make it. On the one hand, you've got to give Bally/Midway a little credit for choosing not to recycle the same old game again for the umpteenth time. On the other hand, Pac-Man is something of a legend in the video game business and legends deserve better treatment. —*J.G.*



CENTURI/KONAMI'S TRACK & FIELD

With the 1984 Summer Olympics just a short jog down the path, it's no surprise that a sports-themed game would be released to coincide with this long-awaited event. And so, Centuri/Konami, the licensing/manufacturing alliance responsible for such successful shoot'em-ups as Gyruss and Time Pilot, has abandoned the realm of combat for the sporting life in Track & Field.

In Track & Field, one-to-four players compete in up to six different Olympic events: 100-meter run, long jump, javelin throw, 110-meter hurdles, hammer throw, and high jump. You control an Olympic athlete who competes against either the clock or the tape measure, depending on the event. In running events, you must beat a specified time; in jumping and throwing events, you must exceed a certain measurement. Doing so will allow you to participate in the next event in the game's progression. You are given only one chance to beat the qualifying time in running events; however, you are allowed three attempts at besting the specified distance in jumping and throwing events. If you fail to beat the qualifying time or distance in any event, the game is over.

At first glance, Track & Field may look tediously easy. By repeatedly tapping a button, you make your athlete run—the faster you hit the button, the swifter your Olympian trots. A second button controls the athlete's jump or throw, and by holding the button down, you can increase the angle of the jump or throw. As I said, it looks easy. But then again, running the hurdles or fling-

ing a javelin for distance always appears easy until you attempt to do it yourself.

As far as graphics and audio effects are concerned, Track & Field is certainly world-class. Competitors, officials, onlookers, and the field itself are given a realistically-detailed look. The top of the screen displays scores, current/qualifying times and distances, and "world record" high scores for the current event. The game is filled with interesting touches including computer voices starting races and giving scores, officials scurrying across the field to make measurements, athletes appropriately waving their arms overhead in triumph or scratching their heads in defeat, and so on.

The first event, the 100-meter run is easy enough; a first-time player can usually beat the qualifyng time without much difficulty. Running against a computer or opponent-controlled speedster helps to squeeze that all-important finish-line sprint out of your fingertips. Things begin to get tougher, however, in the next contest, the long jump. Speed, timing, and a precise jumping angle are necessary for success here. Each event thereafter—javelin throw, 110-meter hurdles, hammer throw, and high jump—becomes an increasingly difficult exercise in each of the three aforementioned skills.

The game progresses for a successful qualifier until the sixth and final contest, the high jump. As in the actual Olympic event, the officials will raise the bar a few centimeters following each succesful jump. No matter how strong a video athlete you are, sooner or later the bar will be raised beyond your limit, and the game will end to the synthesized strains of "Chariots of Fire."

Track & Field is a lot of fun and the kind of game that draws crowds, even in arcades that are filled with flashier laser disc machines. For one thing, the four-player aspect of Track & Field encourages interpersonal competition in a realm of "one-on-one with the computer" games. Also, the game successfully approximates the "physical" effect of sports on a minor scale. Your fingers and wrists will literally ache after putting your video Olympian through a few quarters' worth of his paces.

—J.G.

CENTURI/KONAMI'S TRACK & FIELD

In the past few months a new trend has developed in the arcades—the introduction of interesting and diverse play themes to try to regenerate some of the spark the games once had.

Following on the heels of their well-received Gyruss and Time Pilot, Centuri and Konami (who collaborated on the previously mentioned games) have met again and brought into being an excellent sport-theme machine.

The game is Track & Field, and it complies with two of the arcade's oldest rules: Easy to play, hard to master. Challenging up to four players to compete with each other, as well as the computer, Track & Field presents any sport's fan with the greatest challenges of the Olympic decathlon.

While at the helm of three buttons, two to run and one to jump and throw, you must sprint, leap, and throw your way through 6 separate events, with everything from the 100-meter dash to the high jump. In all the events you must press the 'run' buttons in rapid succession to get as high a speed as possible (measured in cm per second), then, at the appropriate time(s), hit the opposite button to jump and throw. The object of each round is to go fast, or far enough, to meet the computer's qualifying times. Meeting the posted figure entitles you to progress to the next event. Failure, however, immediately ends the game.

The game starts with the entering of your initials. This is a nice touch as the computer prompts you with your own name throughout the match. The first event, the 100-meter dash, is an all-out run, from start to finish. Both the long jump, and the javelin throw require you to pick up all the velocity you can muster, then hit the jump/throw button for the proper duration of time to gain a good angle (usually about 45°). The 110-meter hurdles combine both the speed of the 100-meter dash and the timing of the jumping events. The fifth sport, the hammer throw, is similar to the shot put and discus. By pressing 'run' once, you start your man in motion, and, at the correct time, must hit 'throw' to release the hammer onto the playfield. The final event is the high jump. While at the beginning of the round the bar is positioned low, it increases in height until you fault three times, thereby ending the game.

Track & Field is, in one word, excellent. There is so much going for this game that clearly makes it stand out against the rest. Since all the events are measured in some way, there is a great incentive to play again. Also, adding interest to the game is the inclusion of a world record's board in the upper-right corner of the screen, enticing players to try once more to get their names posted.

The animation is incredible, matching anything that has been seen before. In crisp reds, whites and blues, the on-screen figure moves with true life-like motions, whether he's sprinting across the finish line, or pouting in realms of defeats, Track & Field reproduces human movements with great detail. Even the backgrounds have been meticulously planned, showing other track stars stretching out in the background as you run by, in front of a sell-out crowd.

The sound and voice effects have been done with precision, while each new event opens with a short tune before you begin. If a foul is made, the line judge is quick to verbally point this out, and each measurement is vocalized after completing the event, to the roars and cheers of the crowd if you qualify.

The only real flaw in game play occurs at the final event, the high jump. Even after qualifying, the bar continues to rise until three mistakes are made, thereby ending the game. Although some machines have been changed to return to the previous events, many more have not been altered.

Anyway, beyond this small displeasure Track & Field is a gem. In the current field of new games it is a welcome sight that could give even the laserdiscs a run for their money. I have just one comment for Centuri: Make sure you have plenty of spare 'run' buttons, boys, I have the feeling a lot of machines are going to need them.

—S.H.

BALLY/MIDWAY'S ASTRON BELT

When Sega previewed a prototype of Astron Belt, the first ever laserdisc video game, at the 1982 fall AMOA show in Chicago, it marked the official beginning of disc fever within the industry. Since then, of course, Dragon's Lair and a whole slew of other laser games have stolen much of the thunder from this trailblazing machine. Also in the last year and a half, Sega was acquired by Bally/Midway, the current manufacturer, who subjected it to much fine tuning and location testing. The result is a laserdisc game that other laserdisc games should aspire to become.

Appearing in upright and sit-down models, the premise of Astron Belt is as basic as they come. Similar to many space games the object is to shoot at anything that flies in order to score points. Your spaceship is represented by computer-generated graphics and is easily and accurately maneuvered around the screen by use of a "Tron-style" joystick (which, I'm told is ergonomically designed for improved control). Your ship's lasers are fired by pressing either a joystick-mounted trigger, or one of two console-mounted fire buttons.

As I already mentioned, the basic game play of Astron Belt is ever-so typical. However, it's much more than the usual fly-and-shoot outer space encounter. From a behind-the-ship perspective, you fly though realistically-detailed, laserdisc-generated special effects backgrounds. You'll zip through moving fields of stars, approach and land on planets, and watch gaseous nebulas cloud the heavens. What's more, a never-ending armada of menacing spaceships (that look as good as anything you've seen in a *Star Wars* film) will zoom in and out of your firing range, occasionally blasting your spaceship as they whiz by.

When you hit an attacking spaceship with your lasers, it will explode into a fiery ball of space dust. Likewise, if you are hit by enemy fire or crash into a spaceship or other obstacle, your ship will be pulverized in a similarly spectacular, laserdisc demolition.

At first the game seems like a piece of cake. Early on, the spaceships that fly toward you aren't very aggressive in their flight patterns and will not fire upon you. This is a blessing since novice Astron Belters will need this initial respite to get the feel of flying the spaceship and firing its lasers. (Hint: A light touch of the joystick and knowledge of your effective firing range will go a long way toward high scores in this game.)

Later in the battle, the spaceships attack with greater force. More often than not they will head directly toward your ship and fire upon you without mercy. If you're good enough, the game will go into "extended play." During this period, you must carefully negotiate the tunnel-like terrain of a desolate planet. Steering skill is a necessity here since one wrong move will cause you to crash into the landscape.

Throughout the action, a timer ticks down toward zero. Unless you earn a bonus ship by achieving a preset score, the game ends with the last tick of the clock. However, if you've earned a bonus ship, the clock will reset, and the battle will begin anew.

Unlike cartoon "decision-making" games such as Dragon's Lair and Cliff Hanger, and film-footage background contests such as M.A.C.H. 3 and Bega's Battle, Bally's Astron Belt is a realistic, truly interactive laserdisc game. Simply put, when you shoot at something in the film, it explodes, and vice-versa. The laserdisc-generated effected are smooth, and the game cuts from scene to scene, and scene to explosion, without the blackouts that plagued Dragon's Lair. It may have taken Sega and Bally/Midway a year-and-a-half to perfect Astron Belt, but it's finally here and was well worth the wait.

—*J.G.*

DATA EAST'S BEGA'S BATTLE

Bega's Battle, Data East's long-awaited entry into the laserdisc game market literally takes the quarters out of your pocket with one of the most exciting attract modes this side of Dragon's Lair. Lavishly animated scenes of space battles, strange creatures, beautiful women, horrible destruction, and more flash on screen as you sort through the coins in your pocket. Unfortunately, once you've parted company with six bits you learn

that all of those wonderfully exciting animated scenes are primarily limited to the attract mode. The game that remains is basically your average bottom-screen slide-and-shoot contest played over a laserdisc-generated background.

As revealed in the December issue of *Video Games,* Bega's Battle is based on a Japanese film, Genma Taisen (which, roughly translated, means Armageddon). In the movie, as in the game, the title character, Bega fights to defend the human race against dark forces of evil. You control Bega at the bottom of the screen by means of a "Tron-style" joystick with top-mounted fire button.

In the first of 40 screens, you must destroy and/or avoid a barrage of bricks that are falling from the top of a skyscraper (one assumes that the dark forces of evil have infiltrated the construction workers' union). Each time you allow a brick to crash into Bega, you'll lose one of your five lives. Also, in order to be able to progress beyond this screen, you must link up with the first additional character in the game, Luna. Luna is not only beautiful, but she is powerful. By catching as many of the nine Luna figures in the first screen as possible, you can enlist other Bega's Battle heroes to aid in your fight later in the game.

The second screen finds you in confrontation with a series of menacing red skulls that rapidly slither down the screen after you. Here you must catch a second hero, Joe, who beckons you to the battle in a distinct Irish brogue (as an Americanized version of a Japanese movie character, no less—quite an international game we have here). Joe, when caught, will activate the "Barriers" button on the game console. When pressed, the barriers button will provide Bega, Luna, and Joe with a force shield that protects them against the skulls' attack. You'll need to use them, too, since the skulls are able to slam into you from the side, where you are otherwise defenseless (you can only shoot straight up toward the top of the screen, and not to the sides or at angles).

One word of caution about the barriers—they are annoyingly slow to activate. If they're to be of any real use, you must be able to anticipate danger ahead of time. They are far from being the most reliable force shields in video gamedom (Begas can't be choosers).

The third screen finds you blasting away at what appears to be terrorist jellyfish who are both armed and dangerous. The jellyfish are the downfall of many a Bega's Battler. Later in the game, you can hook up with two other characters. Sony will give you the power to transport back to earlier waves when the going gets tough, and the Indian adds further to the group's firepower. Each additional hero who joins forces with Bega appears next to him at the bottom of the screen and doubles or triples your firepower accordingly. However, this can hurt as much as it can help you since it also makes you a larger target for enemy attack.

I'm told that as you progress beyond the third and later screens the game begins to pull together as a cohesive story. I wouldn't know. I spent several hours playing and watching other people try their hand at Bega's Battle, and I found only one person who had ever made it beyond the third screen. Without question, Bega's Battle is a frustratingly difficult game. (Reportedly, Data East is working to correct this problem, which would be the first time in recent memory I've heard of a manufacturer putting an easier, rather than a more difficult, chip in a game after its release.)

Mercifully for most players, the game allows you to continue the action from the wave in which you lost the last of your lives. However, you must be quick about it; the game gives you only seven seconds in which to take advantage of this function. Ever try to fish two quarters (or tokens) out of your pocket and slide them down a coin slot in less than seven seconds? Like the rest of the game, it's not easy.

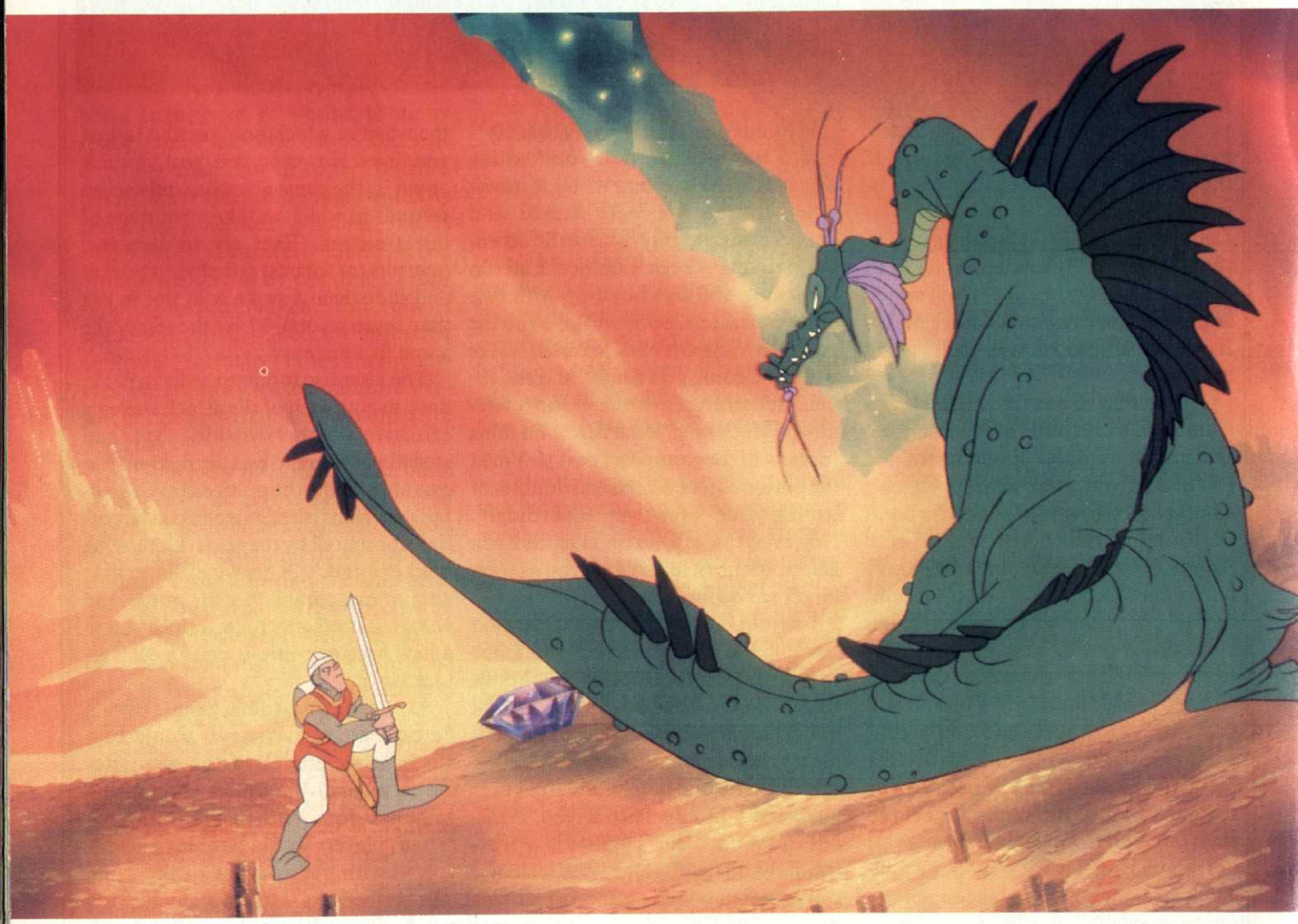
The laserdisc footage used as a backdrop during each of the attack waves is effectively other-worldly, yet can sometimes prove to be a distraction. For example, in the third screen (my downfall), the jellyfishes' missiles can be partially obscured by the colorful, moving background. Otherwise, laserdisc animation, complete with music and voices, is used only to introduce you to a new hero or nemesis before each attack wave.

As a slide-and-shoot game, Bega's Battle is about average. It would be a much better contest if the computer didn't overwhelm you as early in the game as it does. With that problem corrected, players would be able to get involved with the storyline of the game more effectively. However, as it is, it's much too difficult to warrant the repeated plays needed to get good enough to figure out what's going on. Especially at the double-tarriff this laserdisc game usually commands, Bega's Battle should, at least gives you a fighting chance. —*J.G.*

Arcade Games

Playing Tips and Strategies

By Steve Harris and Edward M. Petti



Undoubtedly one of the most remarkable achievements in coin-op entertainment, Dragon's Lair broke new ground not only in new graphic applications but also proved that laserdisc technology could be utilized in conventional game design. Although initial detractors felt that the final product featured a variety of weaknesses such as the blanking of the screen during certain decision points, a supposed lack of true player control and the fact that there is only 'one' solution to beating Dragon's Lair, the effort remains as a popular attraction.

Since there is some debate regarding the amount of points possible to score in the game, in addition to a number of dif-

ferent subtleties in playing Dragon's Lair, Video Games *has decided to bring you two approaches to master the game strategies. See which one suits you best and good luck!—Ed.*

DRAGON'S LAIR

Dragon's Lair from Cinematronics/Starcom/Don Bluth Animation is a major accomplishment in the field of video games. It represents the first commercially viable application in the use of laserdisc technology in an interactive format. This unique approach challenges you to explore a massive 39-room castle in the guise of Dirk the Daring. This gallant knight must confront numerous hazards and obstacles in his quest to save the fair Princess Daphne who is being held captive in the Dragon's Lair.

Even though it's a limited system, with only one correct path to the lair, laserdisc video games are an idea whose time has come.

The game begins with Dirk entering the castle. You must then guide him through a variety of situations to advance to the next room where additional dangers await. Dirk's actions are controlled by an 8-way joystick and sword button. Every time you come to a decision point, the appropriate move must be entered or Dirk will suffer a horrible death.

Description: The castle is divided into three levels with each level consisting of 12 rooms. Once all of the rooms are completed, Dirk will encounter a falling platform which will take him to the next level. Each floor of the castle begins with either the Closing Wall or Flaming Rope sequences and ends with the Throne Room, Tilting Floor or Lava Troll Rooms.

Another thing to remember is that once a room is finished, you will never have to repeat it. Although some of the scenes (the Flying Horse, Enchanted Weapons, Flaming Ropes and Black Knight) are shown twice, you will quickly notice that they appear *backwards* the second time that you encounter them. Once every room has been successfully completed, Dirk will enter the Dragon's Lair and have to save Princess Daphne as well as slay the Dragon.

The challenge of this type of game is somewhat negated by the finality of the laserdisc system. After Dirk's mission is completed, the game, unfortunately, ends.

Strategies: Dragon's Lair is a pattern game that relies less on skill and timing than it does on memorization. Safely exiting a room depending on your knowledge of that scene, so that blindly running through each different encounter is nearly impossible: With a pattern, though, Dirk will master every obstacle with ease. The strategies listed below are literally foolproof, and if followed precisely, will take Dirk to the Dragon's Lair and beyond.

Flaming Ropes: At the beginning of this round, push the stick to the right to grasp the first rope. Once Dirk has a hold of the rope, push to the right every time he releases his grasp. Note: This screen is also shown backwards. Simply reverse the pattern and push the stick to the left.

Closing Wall: Start this room by merely pushing forward. Dirk will then jump through the closing gap to safety.

Flying Horse: Your initial move in this scene is to the right after the horse

proceeds up the first staircase. The following moves are left, right, left, right, right, right. The second time that you encounter the horse, reverse the pattern.

River Boat: As Dirk enters a cave the floor collapses, dropping him into a wooden boat. Proceed to the left, then right, left, right. Dirk will then be caught in "Ye Rapids." Go right, left, right, then left. Completing the rapids takes Dirk to "Ye Whirlpools." To navigate the whirlpools, push left, right, left, right. Dirk's boat will then strike a rock and catapult him into the air. While in mid-air, grasp the chain to the right to finish the board. Note: If you arrive on the screen while on Level 2 or 3 of the castle, the first whirlpool will not be present.

"Drink Me" Room: To exit this area safely, Dirk must move to the right immediately upon entering.

Enchanted Weapons: Dirk is surrounded by flames in this sequence when a sword takes flight. When the weapon

reaches the top of the room it hovers for an instant before streaking toward Dirk. Push the button immediately as the sword begins descending to deflect it. Repeat this process with the attacking mace. An anvil will then rise and fly after Dirk. When it does, push either to the right or to the left to avoid it.

After that, a spear will flash and make a beeline toward Dirk. Push the sword button to knock it away. As the spear hits the opposite wall, Dirk will climb to a pot of flames and insert his sword. Suddenly, the Smithee, with ax in hand, will turn and flail at Dirk. Use the sword to strike the statue and end the round.

Falling Platform: Dirk begins this round by jumping onto a rapidly descending circular disk. The disk will continue down the shaft until it reaches a series of gang-planks at the bottom. If Dirk jumps too early or too late or, if he fails to get off the platform, he will be killed; otherwise, he will land on the crumbling catwalk and leave the screen. Note: When this screen is reversed you can score extra points by taking the elevator to the *ninth* floor. When it is not reversed, always get off on the *third* catwalk.

Wooden Mallets: Perfect timing is required if you are to survive this room. Be alert to Dirk's position. He'll be crouched over, with one hand in front of his body and the other hand in the air. Once you see the hand that is in front of his body stick out into full view, push forward and Dirk will run through the spiraling blocks. After successfully navigating the mallets, Dirk will be confronted by the Grim Reaper. Press 'sword' to destroy the Reaper, then jump back to avoid the killer thorns. Dirk will then run down the hall to a door. Once he reaches the door, press forward to exit the room.

Crumbling Room: In this screen we find Dirk standing in the middle of a rapidly disintegrating room. He must choose one of the 3 doors to escape through or be crushed by falling blocks. Exit through the door to the right.

Knight On Horse: This round begins with Dirk standing inside a cave and an evil mounted knight charging right at him. Move quickly to the left to escape the knight's sword. As the knight and his steed make their second pass, jump to the left again. On the final pass, run to the right. the rider will heave his sword just as Dirk scurries into a tunnel.

Slippery Stairs: Dirk enters the room from the right and slowly walks down the stairs leading to a pit, as the steps begin to flatten out. Push the stick to the left and Dirk will continue walking to the center of the room. As Dirk approaches the open hole, he is confronted by a group of one-eyed tentacles. Depressing the sword button will eliminate the creatures. After slaying the monsters, move immediately to the left to reach the opposite side of the room. Tap the stick to the left once more to finish the scene.

Skull Room: Start this scene by pushing forward to escape the bouncing skulls. When Dirk stops running, push the sword button to eliminate the skeleton claw. After the claw is destroyed, move forward and press the sword button once more. Your next move is to the door opposite the one the second claw appeared in. Dirk will then be in the lair of the Crypt Creeps. Press sword to decapitate the creeps and finish the room.

Lizard King: As this round begins, your sword will be stolen by a magnetic pot of gold. Defenseless Dirk must confront the Lizard King. Run away from him by moving left. The next 5 moves are to the right and should be made as the Lizard rises back on his tail. The pot will then stand still, allowing Dirk to seize it by pushing forward. Once Dirk wields his weapon, continue to press the sword button to kill the King.

Wind Tunnel: Dirk starts this screen by opening a door, releasing a horrendous hurricane of trash and objects. After the room is emptied Dirk will be sucked in. In front of Dirk is a diamond, while to the right there is a door. Leave the gem alone and exit the room.

Bowling Balls: Dirk finds himself standing at the foot of a long hallway as this scene begins. Between him and safety are 6 colored balls which are rolling in a helter skelter fashion as a larger black ball approaches from behind. Wait for the colored ball to pass in front of Dirk before pulling back on the joystick. As Dirk flees, the black ball will shatter the colored ones. Do this six times, then push forward to jump over an open ravine to safety.

Monster Pot: When Dirk enters this screen, green slime begins pouring from an open pot. Jump forward to avoid contact. A bit curious, Dirk will examine a beaker full of liquid as an alligator monster attacks. Use your sword to destroy it. Then pull back to avoid the slime. An apparition will suddenly appear out of the pot. Utilize your sword once again to dispatch the vision and move right to leave the room.

Crumbling Bridge: Dirk begins this round by walking across a foot bridge. As he walks along the bridge begins disintegrating. Quickly push forward twice to avoid falling off. Once Dirk escapes the crumbling bridge, a swarm of bats will attack. Press the sword button to frighten the bats away, then push right two times to safely exit.

Attacking Bats: When this round appears, quickly push the sword button and move left. You will then come to a crumbling staircase. To jump the stairs, push the stick to the left as the stairs fall apart. Dirk will then encounter the King Bat. Strike the bat with your sword, then exit to the left.

Lava Troll: As soon as you recognize this scene, draw your sword. Dirk will lash out at the Trolls, but to no avail. They are impervious to his blade and will try to pounce on Dirk and throw him into the lava. Just as they're about to do so, jump forward over the geyser. The Trolls will continue to chase you as you come to a second spout. Jump forward again. Then run to the right after Dirk lands. Every move after that is forward.

Closing Door: As Dirk enters this scene large steel grates slam down beside him. Push forward immediately to escape through the closing doors at the front of the room. Dirk will then run to the foot of a bridge spanning a river of molten lava. To cross the bridge, merely go left after the geyser has shot into the air.

Tentacle: As Dirk nears this chamber, press the sword button at once to cut the first tentacle. Immediately after slaying the beast, jump forward to the weapons' rack, then run to the opening at the right. As the door slams down in front of you, pull back to move Dirk to the staircase. Dirk will ascend the steps as another tentacle advances. Rather than exterminate the creature, hop on the table to the left and promptly jump straight to depart the room.

Giddy Goons: Just as Dirk enters, a goon will ambush him from behind. Use the sword to kill the monster, then proceed right, up the spiral stairs. Dirk will automatically stroll up the staircase and slaughter another group of goons. To end this round, push forward to leave the room.

Snake Pool: The first move of this scene is to the same side where Dirk's sword is. The floor will begin shaking and breaking apart. Dirk will then run to the corner of the room and stop.

Your next move is forward, away from the disintegrating ground. Move away from the wall beside Dirk, (to the right or to the left) and then ahead into the Snake Pool. Once the asps begin wriggling out of the walls, copy your initial move (to the side Dirk's sword was on) and then jump forward once more. As Dirk stops to rest, an enormous spider will attack. Slay it with your sword, then run right or left. The floor and ceiling will abruptly shoot out and attempt to crush you. Push forward and Dirk will crawl out from between the blocks to safety.

Black Knight: Dirk enters this room just in time to hear Daphne cry out. Suddenly, a Black Knight will appear brandishing an electrified sword that emits electrical currents as he begins hitting the floor. To avoid these currents, jump to the left or to the right of the Knight's sword. If the Knight's sword is

to your left (the Knight's right), go to the right. The second move is opposite of the first, while the third move is forward. The next move is the same as the second, while the following three are opposite of each other. When Dirk leaps to confront the Knight, depress the sword button to destroy him.

Throne Room: Dirk's sword and helmut are taken by the crystal ball situated in the center of the screen as this scene begins. Electrical arches will begin covering the ground directly in front of Dirk as he attempts to retrieve his weapons. To avoid the energy bolts, jump to the right, forward, then right again. The Throne will start rotating as the arches continue to course over the ground. Tap the joystick right to leave the chair and exit the room.

Snake Room: Dirk finds himself in a misty room as this round begins. As Dirk is walking through the fog, an enormous snake will thrust forward. Draw your sword to slay the serpent. Another beast will attack. Press the sword button again to kill it. Use your blade once more to frighten off any additional attackers before grabbing the skull in front of Dirk to finish the room.

Fire Room: As Dirk walks to the back of this room, it becomes unstable and begins tilting forward. Pull back on the stick to move Dirk to the front of the platform and to safety. Suddenly, a fire line will start as portions of the floor begin disappearing. Push forward as the tiles of floor directly under Dirk vanish. Leave through the door at the left.

Dragon's Lair: This is not only the longest of the Dragon Lair rooms, but also the most complex as well. As Dirk looks upon Daphne (who is encased in a large crystal ball) and the sleeping dragon, move the stick to the left to catch the falling objects before they wake the fire-breathing beast. Dirk will then accidently slip on a chest and wake the dragon. Move to the left to avoid the monster's breath and then hit the stick left once more to catch the pillar of goblets. After Daphne instructs you on your mission, the dragon (now wide awake) will begin charging at Dirk. Run back to keep from being crushed by the dragon's massive hands. Next, move left to avoid being ripped open by his immense claws. As Dirk flees the monster, push right 3 times to evade the dragon and grab the magic sword. After ex-

tracting the mystical weapon, turn to the dragon and press the button to slice the creature's flames. Jump left to escape being hit by the dragon's tail, then press the sword button one last time to kill the monster. As the dragon falls to his death, Dirk will approach it and retrieve the key from around its neck. As Dirk frees the captive Daphne from her crystal prison, she jumps into his arms and gives the Knight a thank you kiss. After then, a heart-shaped wreath encircles the couple and the game ends. A kind of video version of "they lived happily ever after." —*Steve Harris*

"Pleeeeease, save me!! The cage is locked, with a key! The Dragon keeps it around his neck! To slaaaaaay the dragon, use the MAGIC SWORD!!"

This is the cry of the blue-eyed blonde in the new "animatronic" video game Dragon's Lair. A crowd of onlookers gathers at your local game room to watch a small boy navigate Dirk the Daring through various rooms. This video game is totally different from others in the arcade. The figures aren't computer generated characters, but rather cartoon like. Drawn by artists and stored on a video disc, each scene depicts Dirk's struggle in his quest to find the girl. He overcomes seemingly impossible situations again and again, culminating in slaying the dragon and saving the princess. On the surface, the game looks easy and, for many, it is. But there are still those who find Dragon's Lair anything but a snap.

The game can become easy with a little help from a plan which I will present here. I have played many different Dragon's Lair machines from Disney World, Florida to Gilley's Night Club in Texas. My pattern now works on all machines, and anyone can be taught how to use it.

However, don't expect to reach the lair on your first or second game. Watch a few people play to get a general feel of the different screens. Then try the pattern. It will take a little practice to coordinate your joystick and sword button through the various rooms.

Key: L go left with joystick; *R* go right; *F* go forward; *B* go backward; *S* push sword button.

General: * When moving the joystick in the prescribed direction, listen for a telltale beep. This indicates your move has been accepted.

* If you attempt to manuever Dirk or his sword and do not hear a beep, repeat the move until it is accepted.

* "asap" indicates a movement as soon as possible after the event described happens. You should not wait for anything else before performing the movement.

* Many rooms have alternate patterns, sometimes left and forward are synonymous, etc. I have given what I feel is the best combination of moves for each screen. In some cases, I have also included an alternate pattern.

* All moves in the descriptions which are not underlined are done automatically. I will set the scene up until the first move. Then follow all underlined

moves, waiting when necessary to complete the room.

* Since you are controlling Dirk the Daring, in effect you become Dirk in the scenes. Therefore, I use "you" and "Dirk" synonymously when describing the moves.

No. 1, Dropping Floor: Dirk steps onto a round wooden floor which immediately starts to drop.

There are four separate times Dirk will enter this room. Three of the times the dropping floor will pause at a bridge on the left (1a, 1b, 1c). The other time the first bridge will be on the right (1d).

For 1a, 1b, and 1c: Go *L* when floor pauses at bridge (at swish sound). You have three chances.

For 1d: Same except you have first three chances to go *R*, then three to go *L*, then three last chances to go *R*. Any one successful jump will save Dirk.

No. 2, Crumbling Room: Dirk is standing facing a door in front of him. The floor at his feet starts to crumble.

Go *R* when floor starts to break, then *R* when then door on the right opens.

No. 3, Filling Wall: There is a brick wall in front of you with a small hole in it. The hole is filling fast.

Go *F* asap.

No. 4, Swinging Flaming Ropes: You are standing on a ledge facing either right (4a) or left (4b). The ledge is receding and a swinging rope, which is on fire, comes toward you. With a little practice, you can do this scene with your eyes closed. For 4a go *R* as soon as rope swings close to your hands. Then *R* when rope stops creaking sound, *R* again, *R* again, both when creaking sound stops.

For 4b the pattern is reversed, i.e. all moves are *L*.

No. 5, Black Laughing Knight on Horse: You are standing outside in front of a triangular sort of opening when a lightning bolt shocks you from behind. A black knight on a horse starts laughing and charges toward you. Go *L* when you first see the horseman. Then *L* when he appears again. Finally go *R* when he comes back a third time and Dirk's face looks scared.

No. 6, Electric Field to Geyser Bridge: You are standing in front of a jagged looking metal door. Behind you is a cylindrical metal grate. The metal grate starts to electrify. Go *F* asap, then *F* asap when electric field lights up. Then wait on the bridge facing the hot geyser for Dirk to look back at the approaching electric field. When he looks back, instantly go *L*. This seems to be the largest window to get through the geyser, although there are alternate methods.

No. 7, Rolling Balls: You are in a multi-colored room with six balls ahead of you alternately swinging back and forth. Suddenly, a larger black ball rolls up behind you. Wait a little for the scene to change with the large black ball right behind you. Wait for the ball ahead of you to cross your path and then go *B*. Do this for each of the six balls which will crumble on the larger ball. After the sixth ball (dark blue), get ready to jump

a small crevice. As soon as you see it, go *F*.

No. 8, Iron Horse: You are in a small room in front of a metal horse. You walk up to the horse and mount it. It takes off violently. There are two such screens, one where the horses head initially faces left (8a), and one right (8b). I will describe only 8a, since 8b will be the mirror image. The key is to avoid all flames (and the brick wall). A flame will appear on the left, so go *R*. Then a flame on the right, go *L*. Then a wall traps you on the right, go *L*, and the last flame on the right, go *L*.

No. 9, "Drink Me": you are standing in front of a vile with an inviting sign over it reading "drink me". Don't drink it unless you wish to turn into salt. Go *R*.

No. 10, Swinging Paddles: You are standing in a large room. In front of you on either side, two large paddles swing horizontally. There is much controversy over how to get through the paddles. Each machine I have played has a slight timing difference, and this method works consistently, provided you can hear the machine clearly. Get as close to the speakers inside the machine as possible. You don't need to see the screen. Dirk will start to grunt "ewww", "aahh". When the second grunt is complete, go *F* quickly. Any delay at all after the grunt is complete will cause you to lose a man. When you hop to the ghost, press *S*. As soon as Dirk puts the sword back in his belt, go *B*. Then, when the door ahead of you starts to open, go *F*. This scene can reverse (10a and 10b), but the pattern is identical.

No. 11, Pot of Gold: A pot of gold flys by you and steals your trusty sword. A lizard king starts to chase you. When you reach the first doorway and the king raises his staff to clobber you, go *L*. Then, at each passageway wait for the pot to pass you going right and go *R*

each time. After about five rights, you'll pass the final doorway which is two walls with flower pots on top, you will see the pot sitting still with your sword. Press *S* repeatedly, quickly until you slice the king.

No. 12, Barrel Water Ride: While going on a small ledge, the cliff breaks through and you land in a barrel traveling on a river. There are four sections to this scene:

**Start:* Go *L,R,L,R* alternately when that side flashes at you. Just follow the flashes.

**Ye Rapids:* Go *L* or *R* alternately four times toward the lighter orange path of each scene immediately upon entering each scene.

—or—

Wait until barrel enters the lighter orange path and go *F* each of the four times.

**Ye Whirlpools:* This portion will either give you three whirlpools if you have been through this level already (see "Breakdown of Levels" section), or else four whirlpools. In either case, one *R* or *L* around the lighter green path provided will navigate you around the pool.

**Finish:* The barrel will hit a rock and Dirk will fly into the air. When the chain on the right flashes and a ringing sound is heard, go *R*.

No. 13, Skulls and Skeletons: You approach a long corridor with many doors on either side. A girl is screaming for help "Save me!". Then, behind you, skulls appear.

This scene can reverse. 13a, the sword is on the left. 13b the sword is on the right. Go *F* when skulls behind you start to bounce, then press *S* asap, go *F* asap, press *S* asap. Now go *L* for 13a (*R* for 13b) away from the tar, and press *S* asap.

No. 14, Flying Weapons: Dirk is standing in the middle of a room with a sword threatingly floating above his head. The sword starts to descend toward him.

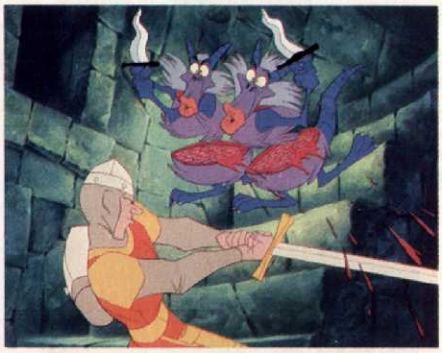
There are mirror images of this screen. One has Dirk wearing his sword on the right (14a), the other on the left (14b).

Wait for the sword to start its descent then press *S*. Then wait for the ball and chain to start is descent and press *S*. Don't jump the gun or you will lose a Dirk. Now when the anvil appears, go *R* for 14a or *L* for 14b (go toward the side of the sword, away from the flames).

Now an arrow will float out of the rack on the wall. Wait until it reaches 12 o'clock and press *S*. Finally, the statue will come to life. When he starts to grunt, press *S*.

No. 15, Wind Tunnel: The girl is carried off again yelling "save me!". You are standing in front of a wooden door.

Wait until the door explodes and a



gust of wind carries you into a room with diamond in front of you. Don't be tempted by the diamond, go *R* when the right hand door opens.

No. 16, Hissing Snakes: You are standing in a room with square holes in the ceiling. There is a skull hanging on a rope dangling from the ceiling.

When the first hissing snake comes out on your left, press *S*. Then one comes out on the right, press *S*. When the third one comes out on the left, press *S* and then go *F* asap to grab the rope and escape.

No. 17, Octopus Arm/Armor Rack: You are standing in a closed room with a bench on your right and an armor rack in front of you. Suddenly, a growl then an octopus-like arm reaches at you from a square opening in the ceiling.

Wait until the octopus arm appears, then press *S*. Then the armor rack will glow, go *F*. Next the door on your right will glow, go *R*. Now wait for the steps behind you to glow, and for a whistle to blow. As soon as the whistle stops, go *B*. Now when the bench on your left glows, go *L*, then *F* asap out the door.

No. 18, Smoke Monsters: You are standing in front of a large bubbling pot. Suddenly, the lid pops off and some sticky stuff spills on the floor.

When the stuff spills, go *F*. Then when the first monster appears, press *S*. Go *B* asap and when the second monster appears, press *S* and go *R* asap out the door.

No. 19, Staircase/Eyeball Creature: Dirk is standing on a wide staircase, looking down. Suddenly, the stairs on his left get smooth.

Go *L* asap when you recognize this room. Then, when you are by the large opening in the floor, and the eyeball creature rears his (head?), press *S*, and go *L* asap. You will walk up to a chain in front of a large metal door. When the chain glows, go *L*.

No. 20, Bench Over Opening: You are standing in a room similiar to the armor rack room. Suddenly, a bench drops onto the floor. It happens so quickly, you hardly notice that it has covered the only exit from the room. A lightning like fire comes out from above you.

When the first flames come at you, go *R*. Then the on the second bolt, go *F*. On the last one, go *B*, then *L* asap to move the bench and leave the room.

No. 21, Hyennas: Dirk climbs up out of a square door. Behind him, creatures that sound like laughing hyennas come toward him.

When you see the creatures, press *S*. Then go *R* up the stairs until Dirk's head is close to the window and press *S*. Finally, go *F* to escape.

—or—

When you see the creatures, press *S*. Then go *R* and then *F* asap. Dirk will automatically slice the creatures. Then go *F* out the door.

Boardwalk Bats: You are standing on a narrow boardwalk hugging the wall of a large canyon. The boards behind you start to collapse.

When the boards start to collapse, go *F*, then again *F* asap around the bend. When you see the first bats, press *S*, then go *R* asap, and again *R* asap.

No. 23, Daggers, Pool, Spider Room: Dirk is standing facing a small round pool of water. The ground on his side starts to collapse.

There are two versions of this room,

one where Dirk's sword is on the left (23a), and the other with it on the right (23b).

The first move should be immediate, toward the side of the sword. I will describe 23a. Go *L*, then *F* asap, then *R* asap toward the pool, then *F* into the pool. When the water snakes appear on your right, go *L* out of the pool, then *F* asap. Wait for the crumbling rock from the ceiling to hit the floor, then press *S* to kill the spider, then go *R* asap toward the door, and *F* asap out the door.

For 23b, the right a left moves would be reversed. Thus, your moves would be *R,F,L,F,R,F,S,L, and F.*

No. 24, Bats/Large Bat: Dirk is another boardwalk over a cavern. He is facing toward the left of the screen when bats fly screeching above his head.

This screen looks similar to the boardwalk bats, but here the bats come at you immediately. Press *S* asap, then go *L* around the boardwalk. When you get to the opening, wait for the boards to glow, then jump *F*, press *S* asap to kill the large bat, and go *L* out the door.

No. 25, Electric Knight: Dirk faces an awesome challenge: An electric knight in a room with a chekerboard floor. The

knight electrifies the floor, sending the charge toward Dirk.

This screen, as if it wasn't hard enough, has two versions. One with Dirk's sword on his left side (25a), and the other on his right (25b).

The pattern for 25a (sword on your left side) is as follows. Go *R* when electric field surrounds you, then *L* asap. Another charge will surround you, leaving a path free of charge ahead of you, go *F* and *L* asap. Finally another charge, go *L, R, L,* all asap. When Dirk goes up to the knight and reaches for his sword, press *S* to kill the knight.

Timing is the hardest part of this screen. It is better to try the move early than late, so keep the joystick moving until you hear the beep, telling you your move is accepted. The screen becomes fairly simple after you've seen it a few times. For 25b, the right and left would again be interchanged. The sequence of moves are *L,R,F,R,L,R,L, and press S.*

No. 26, Rubber Creatures: Dirk is standing in a lava pit with bubbling craters all around him. A fire starts behind him, and lava creatures appear.

Press *S* when the creatures appear. The sword will bounce off them. As soon as Dirk puts his sword back in place, go *F*. Then go *F* asap about five times until you come to a bridge. Stop momentarily at the bridge until it flashes, then go *F* asap repeatedly out the cave.

The real secret to keep from getting caught is again to keep the stick moving forward. But remember to stop at the bridge.

No. 27, Round Foor/Throne: Dirk is standing on a round floor, in front of him stands a ball on a pedestal. The object grabs his sword and his hat.

Go *R* when the hat hits the crystal ball. Dirk will jump, and as soon as he lands go *F* then *R* asap to sit on the throne. The chair will turn, then go *R* asap out of the hot seat.

No. 28, Tilting Floor: Dirk is standing on a checkerboard floor which is tilting back and forth. The light in front which is tilting back and forth. The light in front of him falls and then the floor tiles start to disappear. Go *B* after the fire light falls and the first floor boards start to disappear. Dirk will step back, and then jump to split his legs. As soon as he lands, go *F*, then *L* asap out the door.

No. 29, Dragon's Lair: You've finally made it! "Wow!" Dirk exclaims as he sees the girl he has been searching for. There is a treasure piled high to your left which starts to topple.

The treasure on your left will flash as it starts to topple, go *L* to save it. Then Dirk makes the mistake of walking on a treasure chest which slides down the hill toward the dragon. The dragon wakes up, his ears rising sharply. Go *L* to avoid his flaming breath. Then the treasure pile again tries to topple, save it by going *L*.

Let the girl finish her plea for help. When the dragon starts chasing you, and you stop at a broken column he will reach around the column with his claws twice. Right after his second claw go *B*. Again you stop at a column and draw your sword. But don't use it yet, go *B*.

You are running fast and come to a pile of gold with a column at your right.

Go *R* quickly, then *F* toward the magic sword, and press *S* again to block the dragon's flame. The captive girl will clap and distract you from your struggle. The dragon raises his tail to swat you, go *L* to avoid it. Finally, one more *S* will slay the dragon. You've done it!

Under normal circumstance, this is the method for achieving the highest score on Dragon's Lair. When you get the flaming ropes screen with the ropes to the left (4b), don't jump immediately. Wait until the ledge beneath you receds into the wall and Dirk says "uh oh". Then the rope will swing back to you at which time you jump *L*. Then follow the pattern. This will give you a few hundred more points. Also, always jump at the last available point on screen 1a,b,c, or d.

If you manage to get all the way to the Dragon's Lair on your first man, do not throw the final sword to kill the dragon. Die twice on that final move, and on your third man slay the dragon. This will give you the maximum points under normal circumstances.

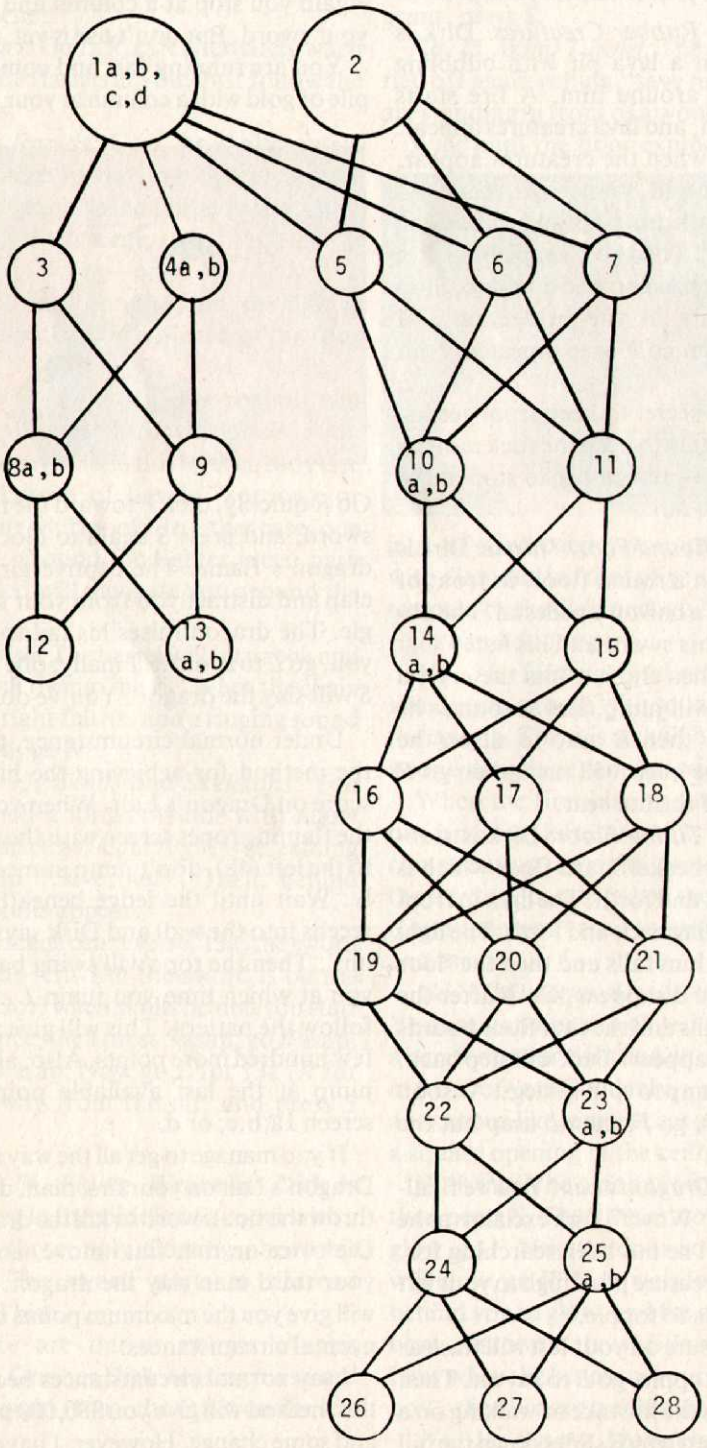
I say normal circumstances because this method will give you 380,000 points and some change. However, I have gotten over 450,000 several times. I believe

if you die on the "drink me" screen (9) and one of the flaming ropes (4a or 4b), the machine will sometimes forget which screen is next. This will cause you to be sent back to the beginning, and give you many extra points. I am not sure if this happens only on a system glitch, or whether it is a part of the normal machine processing.

The machine follows a definite pattern from one room to another. It will start on screen 3 or 4. Then will continue down a path shown in my diagram to the bottom of the tree. When it reaches the bottom, it will start again at the top with screens 1 or 2, remembering where you have been. If you mess up a screen, it will give that one to you again last, before you enter the dragon's lair. All screens must be completed before you get to the dragon's lair.

Diagram Explanation: Star on the diagram at 3, 4a, or 4b. Then move downward, following any path. When you visit a room, and successfully complete it, you will not return. Remember that rooms with "a,b," are considered separate rooms. Always go downward. When you reach the bottom of any path, go to 1 or 2. On a normal game, when all screens are complete, rooms 26, 27, and 28 are the only ones normally before the dragon's lair. This diagram is handy for indicating which room may come next.

—Edward M. Petti



1a,b,c,d: Dropping Floor
2: Crumbling Room
3: Filling Wall
4a,b: Swinging Flamed Ropes
5: Black Knight on Horse
6: Electric Field to Geyser
7: Rolling Balls
8a,b: Iron Horse Ride
9: "Drink Me"
10a,b: Swinging Paddles
11: Pot of Gold
12: Barrel Water Ride
13a,b: Skulls and Skeletons
14a,b: Flying Weapons
15: Wind Tunnel
16: Hissing Snakes
17: Octopus Arm / Armor Rack
18: Smoke Monsters
19: Staircase / Eyeball Creature
20: Bench over Opening
21: Hyenas
22: Boardwalk Bats
23a,b: Daggers / Pool / Spider
24: Bats / Large Bat
25a,b: Electric Knight
26: Rubber Creatures
27: Round Floor / Throne
28: Tilting Floor

Coleco's Super Action Controllers For Super Action Games

By Mark Brownstein and Mike Sittnick

Super Action Baseball

About a year ago, Coleco promised to deliver a super baseball game that was supposed to give you exceptional control of all the players, and even let you program a "World Series" by selecting all-time greats to play on your team.

Coleco has come through about halfway. You don't get any choice of players—and that's probably good. If you were to rely on averages for each of your players, the game would become little more than selecting teams and putting the whole thing on autopilot. The other part of the promise—a good game with much better control—was delivered very well.

For about $70, you can get two Super Action Controllers and a Super Action Baseball cartridge. First, a word about the controllers: They're great. The controllers are a hand-held contraption, with a numeric keypad at the top, a top-mounted joystick, and a unique spinning wheel all built into the top. The controller is hand held, and has a button for each of the four fingers holding it. The controller fits all but the smallest hands (if your hands are small, or you have children, try before you buy), and comes with an adapter to provide a comfortable fit for large-handed players.

Wisely, Coleco didn't give you more features in the controller than you actually need to play the game. (The planned tactile feedback device, which

would strike your hand when the ball hit the back, didn't make it into production.) To pitch the ball, you punch in a number on the keypad to select the speed of the pitch, move the joystick to put some control on the ball, and select the type of pitch (knuckleball, curve in, curve out, and straight). The batter varies his swing by varying his movement of the joystick. And, of course, an umpire calls the strikes.

If the batter hits the ball, the screen momentarily blanks. The ball is seen flying through the air, and control of the fielders reverts away from the pitcher. To field the ball, the player squeezes the appropriate trigger on the handle, and uses the joystick to move the player to the ball. Once the ball is caught or fielded, perfect throws are made to the designated base by selection of the appropriate finger button.

Meanwhile, the runner is moved around the base paths in the desired speed and direction by spinning the top-mounted wheel. The combination of the controller and the game cartridge gives you unprecedented control over the game play. In addition to controlling most aspects of the fielding and baserunning, you are also given the option for selected players to steal bases (not just making *everybody* run, no matter what), and to pick off base stealers. Just about the only thing you can't do is bunt (or maybe I haven't figured out *how* just yet).

There are a few variations allowed on the cartridge. Since this game is one that takes practice, you are provided with a batting practice mode and two fielding practice modes, in addition to a competitive mode. Once you and a friendly opponent learn to play the game, it's bound to provide many hours of enjoyment.

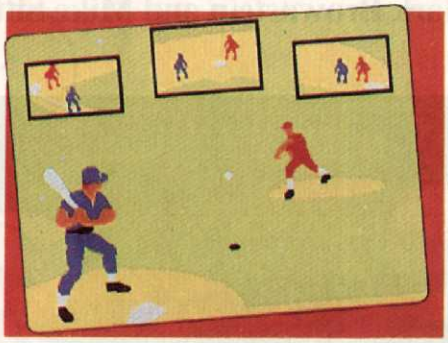
The key to really succeeding at this game is *practice*. Super Action Baseball is not a game that you can play well when you first take it out of the box. If you practice pitching and fielding, and get your finger controls down pat, Super Action Baseball may become one of your all-time favorites.

—M.B.

Super Action Baseball

Move over Intellivision Major League Baseball! Coleco's new baseball game is the new standard that all baseball games will be judged by. Coleco's first sports game entry is a real winner. Not only does the game give player's more control over pitching, hitting and running, but it is easier to learn than other quality baseball cartridges as well.

The game comes packaged with the Super Action controllers which are perfect for a baseball game. The improved joystick is more comfortable and has better action. In addition to the sports games that are used exclusively with the controller, the controller's joystick also improves action on space



games, but it is sometimes unreliable for maze or ladder games. The controller also sports a pistol grip design with four fire buttons that the fingers permanently rest on. The fire buttons are extremely easy to use. They are also equally accessible to both lefties and righties. The keypad is a calculator-button style, which is an improvement in response over the bubble-card used on the original controllers. Finally, the controller also houses the long-awaited speed roller, which was suppose to be included with the original controllers. The controller originally was going to sport a "kicker." This would have caused the controller to "kick back" in the player's hand, allowing him to feel the ball or a hit. This was dropped from the final design for technical reasons. Nonetheless, the Coleco Super Action controller is excellent and will add to many Coleco games, not just the sports games.

What the controller does for Baseball, however, is beautiful. Use of the keypad has been kept to a minimum. It is used only between pitches to set the pitch's speed, or to set up a steal or a pick off attempt. The four fire buttons are used to select the type of pitch. These buttons are also used to move fielders. The game decides whether the situation calls for an infielder or an outfielder, so instead of having to look down at the controller all the time, the player can pick his fielder without even looking. The four buttons are also used for throwing the ball. Once the ball is fielded, each button stands for a base. If the appropriate fielder is covering the base, he will move to the base to cover before the ball is thrown. The joystick controls placement of pitches, the swing of the bat, and movement of fielders. The speed roller in conjunction with the fire buttons controls the base runners.

The game has two separate screens. The first screen is a graphically realistic closeup of the pitcher and batter, with three mini-screens at the top showing the three bases. Because of the Zaxxon-like angle of the close-up, the batting sequence now has three dimensions. The batter must worry about the height of the pitch as well as whether it is inside or outside. There are actually over 100 different pitches the pitcher can throw, and the batter can swing in 24 different ways. Once the ball is hit, the screen switches to a full-field shot.

This game is thoroughly enjoyable. Its design makes game play strategic without taking away reflex action. The game can be picked up in an hour, but will remain challenging as the opposition also improves. The game allows stealing, pick-offs, double & triple plays, sacrifice flies, hit & runs, intentional walks, and control over each individual runner. The latter is a big plus. For instance, if there are men on first and third, and a fly ball is hit to right field, the man on third can tag up without making the man on first run towards second for a sure out. It would also be possible to have the man on first steal with out forcing the man on third to steal home.

This game does have limitations, however. There is no bunting, rundowns are difficult because the players automatically run back towards the base to catch the ball, and it is impossible to run and throw the ball simultaneously. The only other complaint with the game is that the sound effects are mediocre and sometimes irritating, except when the organ plays "charge" during a rally, and that the pitcher won't field. If there is a slow dribbler up the first base line, the first baseman doesn't have anybody to throw to at first and must tag the runner if he can.

These complaints are fairly minor,

though, and although Super Action Baseball is not perfect, it is far ahead of every other video game baseball game.

—*M.S.*

Rocky Super Action Boxing

Rocky is Coleco's second game designed specifically for the Super Action Controller. It pits Rocky against Clubber Lang (the character played in the movie by Mr. T). As with Super Action Baseball, the game options include numerous practice modes (4 as Rocky, 4 as Clubber Lang, at increasing skill levels), in addition to a head-to-head mode and a demo mode.

Once you select your play option, an image of Rocky wearing his championship belt appears on screen, with background music of the Rocky theme.

Each round lasts one minute. The joystick on the top of the controller moves your fighter right or left, and to any of three unmarked lanes. The idea, of course, is to get close to your opponent. You are provided with a limited repertory of boxing maneuvers: A blow to the head, a blow to the body, a duck (bent down, with hands covering the face), and a gloves-up protective stance. The object of the fight is to either wear down or knock out your opponent. Enough blows to the body will tire the opponent out, making him more susceptible to knockdown. Head blows can quickly result in knockdowns (and the eventual knockout). Ducking will protect you from head and body blows, but you can't punch your opponents from a crouch.

On the overhead scoreboard, you can monitor fatigue and daze on their respective indicators. The more fatigued or dazed your boxer is, the more susceptible he will be to a knockdown or knockout.

At the end of each round, the score is displayed. In addition, the leader's overall advantage scrolls across the scoreboard. If there is no knockout in the ten rounds of the fight, the winner is the one with the most points.

Although the play mechanics are relatively simple, there is much room for developing specific strategies. For example, is it better to try to deliver nothing but head blows than it is to weaken the body and go to the head when you have an opening? Try it and see.

At the end of the fight (whether won by knockout or on points), the winner is seen in a victory stance, wearing the championship belt. The scoreboard scrolls the right result (Rocky Wins... Rocky Wins...), and the victory theme plays. What could have been just another dumb boxing game has been developed into a rather good contest.

What gives this game a special value is the relative unpredictability of whether a knockdown would become a knockout. When a boxer goes down, he staggers backwards, and finally drops. The referee counts the seconds, simulated crowd noise counts along with him, and the downed boxer is motionless for most of the count. If you really get into the game, you will probably find yourself yelling at your boxer to get back up. Since the recovery is computer controlled, there is an element of excitement built into the cartridge. One area where this unpredictability is undermined is when a boxer goes down at the end of a round. More than once a boxer has been saved by the bell.

The sound effects are almost as good as the graphics and are much better than the sounds in the graphically similar Super Action Baseball. Of course, the Rocky theme is played, and played well, using all three sound channels.

One of the strongest points about this game is that, unlike Baseball, most children can easily learn to play the game. They may not become experts, but they should be able to make head punches and move the boxers around a ring. The game is very satisfying for them.

Fortunately, there is no gore involved in the game, just a couple of electronic clowns punching it up for our entertainment. When the next round starts up, each boxer is well again, ready to go right back into the fray. Since it isn't the object of this review to comment on the sport of boxing, playing this game is certainly much safer than stepping into the ring with Mr. T—and probably a lot more fun.

Coleco has done a good job in integrating the Super Action Controller into the game play of both Rocky and Baseball. They have used the controller as a tool to enhance game play, rather than as a gimmick to sell more hardware.

Using the Super Action Controller for games not designed for the controller is possible, but seldom an improvement over the controller included with the unit, or the replacements available from other manufacturers. Coleco promises a Super Action Football game that will use the controller. If they make as effective use of the controller with Football as they have with Baseball and Rocky, the controller may just become a valuable addition to your accessory collection.

To pay $70 for *two* controllers plus a game is expensive, but probably worth it—especially if you want a definitive version of home baseball. With Rocky also available, and probably with some other excellent games that make use of the controller, this seems to be a good investment.

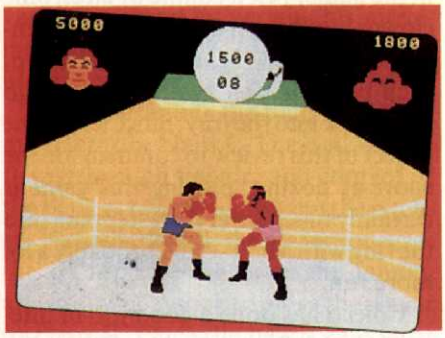
—*M.B.*

Rocky Super Action Boxing

Look out, Mattel! Coleco is making a serious run for the title "King of Sports Games." First, Super Action Baseball dethroned Mattel's critically acclaimed Major League Baseball for realism and playability. Now, Rocky Super Action Boxing does the same for its respective sport.

Rocky Boxing is a contest that allows one player, as either Rocky Balboa or Clubber Lang to battle the unchosen boxer which is controlled by the com-

puter. The player can also choose the head-to-head option that pits two players against each other. Each boxer is awarded points for punches to the head and body, and for each knockdown. Punches to the head increased the punched boxer's "daze factor."



Punches to the body increase the boxer's "fatigue factor." A dazed boxer is more vulnerable to a knockdown punch, and a fatigued boxer's movements will be slower.

There are indicators on the screen for both boxers showing daze and fatigue. The game requires Coleco's Super Action Controller because there are four separate "action buttons" involved; two for punching the head and body, one for blocking, and one for ducking. Players win by either outscoring the opponent, or by a knockout. The number of rounds increases with the skill level.

The game itself is rather simple. Rocky Boxing allows the player to move his boxer forward, backwards, and sideways, but in a limited manner. For one thing, the boxers can never rotate or pass each other. Although this limitation detracts from the realism, it adds to playability (and prevents memory and graphic problems!). Although the boxers can move sideways, there are only three lanes of sideways movement. That is, if the boxer starts in the middle "lane", he can only take one step to the right or one step to the left. Despite the limitations of movement, however, Rocky Boxing has more realistic computer animation than practically any other game going.

The whole graphic effect of Rocky is what truly separates the game from being a simple "knockdown, drag-out affair" (pun-intended). Not only are the figures rendered realistically enough so that an innocent bystander can recognize the boxers on the screen without knowing the title of the game, but Coleco threw in a hyperactive referee who is always running from side to side to get the best angle. The game also includes a title screen of near photographic quality depicting Rocky from the waist up.

Animation is almost always perfectly smooth, though the referee will sometimes magically "pop" from one place to the other. Sometimes, if the boxers are close together without punching they will "pop" into a clutch. These are extremely minor detractions. Graphically, this game is tops. It really shows the ColecoVision's superior ability for handling animation and detail. Unfortunately, the ColecoVision's limited palette of colors shows through for the first time, too. Because the ColecoVision only has 16 colors, Rocky is wearing *green* gloves and Clubber is wearing *blue* ones! Still, this cartridge is one of Coleco's top graphic renderings.

The sound effects are almost as good as the graphics and are much better than the sounds in the graphically similar Super Action Baseball. Of course, the Rocky theme is played, and played well, using all three sound channels. The crowd chants are timely and not terribly annoying (unlike Baseball). The regular noises, like a solid punch and the sound of the bell, are well-orchestrated. They are not overdone.

The game itself is a good one. It's simple, but the action is excellent both in smoothness and consistency (without being repetitive); and the computer makes a very challenging opponent. For two players, the head-to-head option makes the game even more alive and fresh.

The only real complaints with the game are that the higher skill levels have more rounds and that there can be no draws. There is no reason to believe a person wants to play a longer game just because he chose a harder option. There should be a separate option screen to allow the player to choose the number of rounds. As far as draws go, there aren't any. If the players just leave their boxers in their corners for the duration of a fight, the computer will randomly award the victory to one of the boxers, one to nothing! Nonetheless, Rocky Boxing is a fine addition to the ColecoVision collection. Owners who also have the Super Action Controllers should consider this cartridge, even if they have been dissatisfied with other boxing games. —*M.S.*

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MICHAEL KATZ

Epyx—Making It Through Marketing

By Mary Claire Blakeman

Epyx, a software entertainment company in Sunnyvale, jumped from about $1 million in sales to more than $6 million in 1983. And Michael Katz, president and C.E.O., says the firm could double its sales annually for the next two or three years.

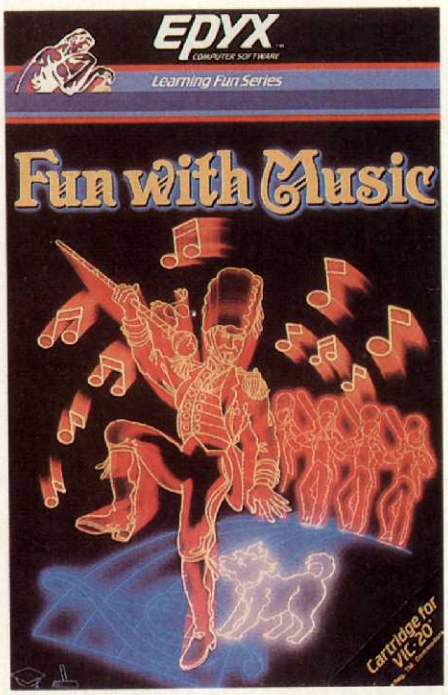
Epyx plans to make these predictions real by blending the special mix of marketing and strong game design in just the right proportions. In some companies, when designers dominate, their products may be technically interesting but players simply don't go for them. But in other cases, as Atari found out, putting all the money into marketing while neglecting research and development doesn't work either.

In late 1983, Epyx signed up Bob Brown and the Starpath design team as part of its process for building up internal design capabilities. Brown developed Atari's VCS system before founding Starpath.

In marketing, Katz contributes his own experience as the man who set up the formal marketing arm for Coleco.

Katz, who sometimes uses the word "opportunities" as a substitute for the word "problems," thrives on challenges. He guided Mattel Toys toward the first hand-held video games and then went to Coleco when it had just lost $23 million dollars and was instrumental in turning around that loss. In February of 1983, he joined Epyx because he says, he wanted to be involved in a new entrepreneurial venture.

From his experience in Coleco, Katz has instituted daily meetings to check the pulse of game sales. Also, Epyx is among the first companies to offer demonstration discs directly to consumers so players can get a taste of a game before buying it. Other marketing changes Epyx is instituting include "Buy 1 Get 1 Free" offers and clearer packaging graphics.



The company is also positioning itself for a broad-based assault on the marketing of software by offering a diverse line. Already it has a reputation for good strategy games, such as the hit Temple of Apshai, but now it also offers action-strategy, Learning Fun and Arcade Classics. Also, CBS will be marketing and distributing the Epyx line internationally.

All of these developments fit with Katz' vision for the future. Within the year, Katz predicts, Epyx will be in the top five independent computer software companies. . . if not in the top two.

Video Games: Who designs games at Epyx? What sort of team do you have?

Michael Katz: We really have an internal design capability that consists of about 13 internal game designers or software designers, and the majority of those people we just acquired from Starpath, who had a very fine design group but, unfortunately, had a product that was too late with too little (they had the Supercharger).

Their group stayed together for about a year and a half, which was a compliment to them, while the company was not doing particularly well. But there are many designers in the group who have had experience at coin-op companies or companies such as Atari or others in our industry, and they work on the basis of a salary and a royalty. We have them working on new games now to introduce at the CES, that are either in the action/strategy area or the learning fun area.

We also work with outside design groups who we contract with to work on specific projects. They're paid in advance, basically, and get a royalty. Some of those groups do conversions only. All of our Arcade Classics were converted by a group in New York from the actual coin-op arcade games to home computer format. Or we work with outside groups like Bob Ogden who had Action Graphics in Chicago. He did Pit Stop. We give them the concept and if they're excited about it they will do it and execute it and do a finished game. So Bob Ogden did it not only for the Atari, but for the Commodore, and Coleco Adam. Or we work with an outside group who might present concepts or story boards to us, and if we're interested we'll contract them to do a particular product.

So we've got the best of all worlds. We've got experts on the outside and flexibility to work with internal and ex-

ternal groups. That's one of our strengths. We don't really do things until the last possible moment which sounds like a negative but really isn't. The reason is due to the fact that because in our business things change so quickly, you want to wait to see what system is going to be the hot one. So at the last CES show in June, we developed programs that were only prototypes because we wanted to wait to see what the trade reaction was going to be. In addition, we were looking at systems and wanted to determine which models would be the leaders. So we came out of the show and ended up developing as much as we could for the Commodore 64, which was the hot system for Christmas.

It's that kind of flexibility and versatility, by being small and moving fast which is good. We also try to be opportunistic. In fact we just got the license for Isaac Asimov's "Robot" series, which is one of the best science fiction series. And we jumped on the license for Anne McCaffey's "Dragonriders" and "Dragonriders of Pern." So we like to look for things and once we find them, jump on them pretty quickly.

The Arcade Classics—from Bally/Midway and Exidy—was pretty opportunistic. We have an arrangement for international sales and marketing with CBS. I was familiar with the CBS arrangement with Coleco where we worked out something for ColecoVision. Now we're the only software company for which CBS is distributing and marketing product internationally.

VG: How does the process of designing games actually work at Epyx?

MK: Our game design process is unique compared to many other companies. We're really driven by marketing. We develop games and software for specific categories and niches in the market. We don't call game designers into a room on August 1 and tell them to come back two months later with games, not knowing what they're going to be, whether they'll be saleable, marketable or interesting. The game designers are free to execute and create to their heart's content, but we really do want them at a starting point where product is there theme-wise, category-wise, and concept-wise.

VG: You say Epyx is "market-driven" but how does that actually work? Where do the marketing people and the designers get together?

MK: The product development process is really to identify how many new titles we want in each category in order to make our volume targets for the year. So we might say we want one or two new strategy games, or two new learning games.

Then we do a complete competitive survey of what is in the marketplace in terms of the products in those categories that are doing well. We also review the progress of our efforts and will then try to develop new concepts through brain-

Corporate symbol for Epyx, Inc: Rodin's "Thinker" with joystick.

storming sessions. This process is participated in by not only game designers, but also members of our sales department, as well as by the marketing and operations people. So it's really a team effort, which brings together people from a number of disciplines because we think that this approach can be creative and highly effective.

At the next stage, the game designers will either warm to one of the concepts or submit their own which will be evaluated by this group. We'll then say, okay, go with it and develop a time table as well as a plan of attack for each product.

VG: In putting together your design team, why did you choose Starpath? What was the idea behind this acquisition?

MK: We had always been impressed by Bob Brown and his design staff. They were a self-contained unit and had worked together for over a year, which is unusual for the software business. We thought that we could either build our own internal group by going through the process of finding individual, independent game designers, but realized that this would take a great deal of time. Or we could go after a group that already existed which we thought had some definite capabilities both proven and unproven. In addition, we knew that the Starpath people had capabilities beyond what they were able to demonstrate with the Supercharger system. In fact, Bob Brown designed the Atari VCS when he was there. Then he was a vice president of engineering at Hitachi. Bob was one of the founders of Starpath and the Supercharger product is his patent and design.

VG: In hiring the Starpath group, does that signal a new direction for you or is it just strengthening existing plans?

MK: It's a strengthening of our internal design group. There's better control, in some instances, when you have your own internal group. But we really just feel, philosophically, that to be a computer software company we want to have a strong internal group rather than having to rely on outside resources.

VG: Just to complete the discussion about designers, do you ever use programs from amateurs?

MK: We don't encourage outside submissions from non-professionals, or people who are not employed totally in software design. At Mattel, for years, they had an outside submission department staffed by about five people, however it wasn't cost effective when you weighed the everyday expenses against the very few toy designs or games that actually came to fruition. For every 10,000, maybe only one was explored to any great degree because it's really important to know what sells and the best people to know that are the people already at the company or in the trade.

VG: We've talked about the designers, now tell me about the marketing. Is that really your area?

MK: We've got a marketing director who has a consumer electronics background and knows the professional disciplines of marketing. He works with different groups, such as package designers or our public relations firm, and

also develops promotions for our products.

We're unusual in that, by being marketing driven, it doesn't only refer to how we establish products. We actually use the game just as a starting point. There's packaging we've done which has received many plaudits. Two good promotions that were developed by the marketing department included a "Buy 2, Get 1 Free" program where the consumer bought two of our products at retail, sent us their proof-of-purchase and we would then send them a free game from our inventory. This really helped stimulate sales during last summer.

Right now, we're involved with an innovative demo disc program, or sampler discs where the consumer can mail $2.50 to us, get a disk (Atari or Commodore) that has five actual working segments from five of our new games at a minute each for each segment. The consumer can experience at home what our new games are like before he purchases them. Then, if he goes out to buy any of the new games and sends us proof that he's bought one, we'll refund the $2.50. This way game players get a chance to try out new titles at home before they decide what to buy.

VG: How is that program being received?

MK: Very well. In about the first two weeks, we had about 1,500 requests. We'll be doing a promotion in early 1984 that will be a "Buy 1, Get 1 Free," because we know the retailers have had a problem in the past few years with carry-over product after Christmas. So we're going to do the free offer but make it even stronger by making it a one-for-one this time instead of a "Buy 2, Get 1 Free."

VG: Do you think other people will pick up on the demo disk idea?

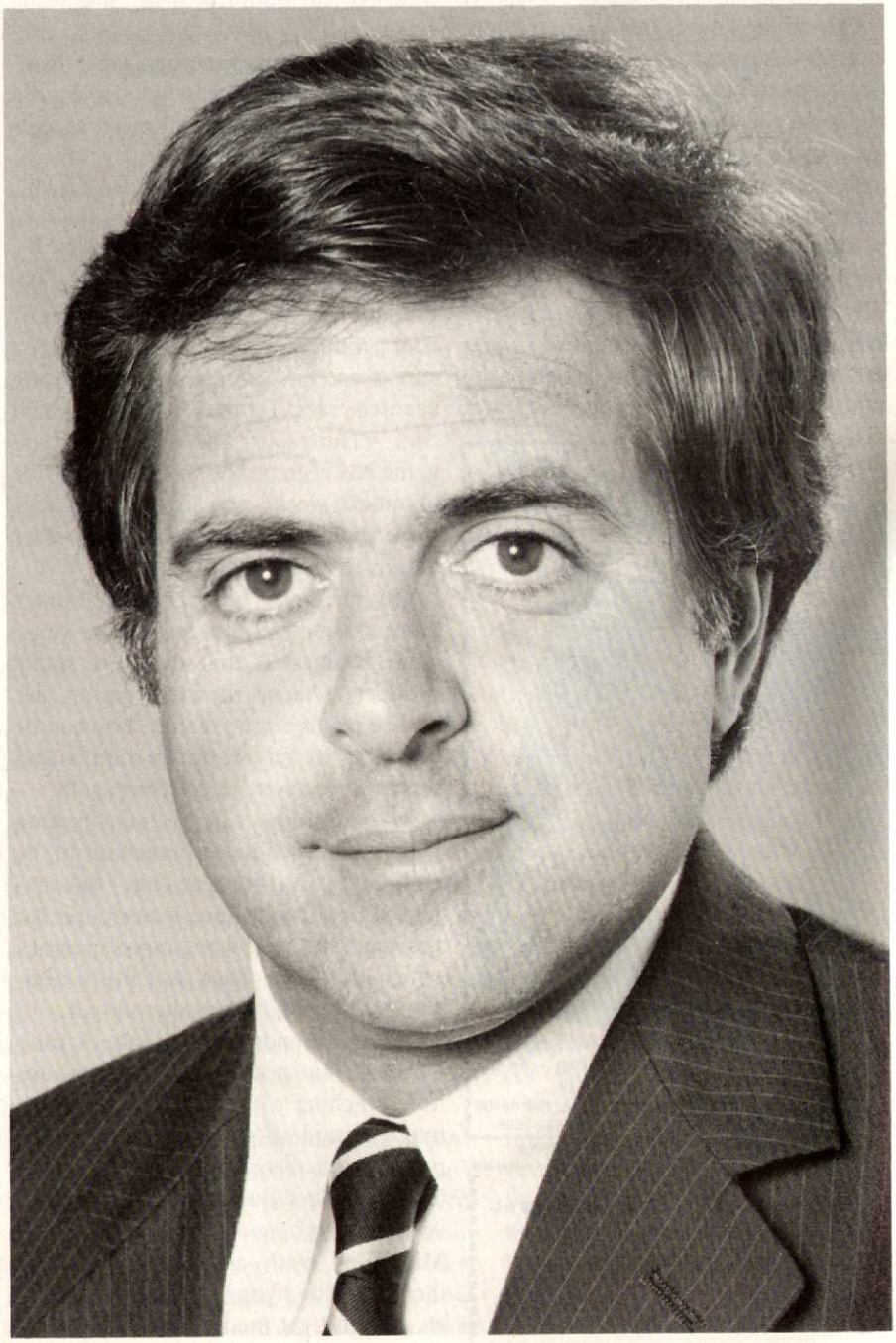
MK: We've gotten many compliments already. I think we might be one of the first to make it available to the consumer, so it probably will be copied. We're going to continue with it for new products, each time we introduce them.

VG: It sounds like you're not so much market driven but oriented more toward the ultimate consumer who is the game player. Is that the philosophy here?

MK: We really want to get our products into the hands of the consumer and anything that can be done to encourage this, whether it's building awareness through advertising or publicity, is valid. We feel, as all the companies do, that editorial reviews, rankings and ratings are extremely important. As soon as we get games manufactured, we send them immediately to the key editors because the word of mouth that's generated out of the computer and game books, based on reviews and editorials, has been signficant. So it's anything from building awareness to actually doing things to encourage purchase.

VG: Do you test your games on a young group of teenagers who will give you feedback before you're ready to go to market?

MK: We do focus groups. I didn't mention market research which is part of being marketing oriented. We test concepts when they're new to make sure they're of interest to the potential consumer. We do exploratory focus groups to probe what's happening in the marketplace, to determine if we're on the right track or not. And then we do game testing when we have a prototype.



Michael V. Katz, President/CEO, Epyx, Inc.

We actually do a preference test by having kids play it against control products that are somewhat similar if there are any, so we get a ranking of how ours stacks up compared to others.

VG: Speaking about the market, where do you see the industry now compared to six months ago?

MK: The industry is going through some very real shake out pains now It used to be that you didn't have very tight control over inventory or spending, and you didn't have to watch what you were doing real closely. Many people went into television (advertising) in too heavy a way when it wasn't, perhaps, necessary.

One of the keys is just having vision, or at least keeping very close tabs on the market by talking to your key customers and your sales people as often as you can, to find out what's happening out there in the industry and what's happening with your products. You should then be able to better plan your manufacturing and inventory.

VG: How do you do that?

MK: Every morning at 9:15 we have a meeting for all the key managers in the company and we review the sales and shipment results for the month to date. We also talk about any problems and what's happening in the marketplace that might affect what we're doing.

VG: And you do this every day?

MK: Yes. We want to be sure that there's good communication and everybody knows what's going on in terms of key problems and given opportunities. The routine is something that they do at Coleco every day and have been doing for years. At Coleco they used to call it the Telex meeting because it was originally established to review telexes from the Orient, since that's where much of the manufacturing was being done.

VG: Apart from the recognizable diversity of your products, what else do you think is contributing to Epyx's success right now?

MK: Ironically, our success so far this year has really not come from the new products introduced at the June CES show because they're just hitting the market. Instead, it's come from three or four products which are now considered staples and have been around for as long as three years. Temple of Apshai, which is a "Dungeons and Dragons"-type game has been on the "Softsell" list for about 52 weeks now and hit number three about a month ago and that's after all this time.

One difference between the computer game business compared to the video game business is that there are staple products whereas the video games, per se, are much more volatile. You can be on top for about one or two months and then you're never heard from again.

In addition, strategy and thinking games are much more important in the computer software area. This is to be expected because you buy a computer for the fact that you want more memory which therefore gives you more decision-making and more alternatives.

VG: But it sounds as if, with the Arcade Classics, that perhaps video games are now reaching a point where they too may be staples. You might even compare it to the record industry where purchasers collect classics. Is that part of your strategy?

MK: Well, with our "Classics" line, there's a little hype involved. We knew we couldn't get the hot new titles from the arcade companies because they were all tied up with such companies as Parker Brothers, Atari and Coleco. But we figured with the more traditional and older efforts, that really led the way to some of the recent games, that they might still be available. Some of them required a bit more time or thinking and were, perhaps, not as long-lived in the arcades. However, it was a combination of knowing we could get the classics because they were available and then creating a rationale as to why they belonged in the Epyx line.

Part of it was that we wanted to have a relationship as little "Epyx Shemepyx" with people like Bally/Midway and Exidy and we felt that it would lead to good things in terms of our relationships with the arcade community. In fact, this has been true because Exidy subsequently offered us "Fax" as a home computer translation and they probably wouldn't have done so if we hadn't started a relationship with Pete Kaufman (president of Exidy), based on "Fire One" and "Starfire" which are part of our "Arcade Classics" line.

VG: So you're going to keep developing that line?

MK: Well, it's tough to generate new "Arcade Classics" because a classic by definition, has to be an older game and the more recent titles are still under license in many cases, to some of our competitors or other larger companies. We'll be looking for additions to this series from past efforts but our definition of classics might have to change if we are to include other arcade titles.

VG: Of the four categories of games you have now, which is the most popular?

MK: Based on time, we're still doing more volume in the pure strategy area, but the action-straegy games will probably be our second biggest. "Jumpman" and "Pit Stop" fit into that action-strategy category.

The "Learning" category is an area where we have a "wait and see" and "show me" attitude because I've seen learning in electronic games, starting with hand-helds at Mattel and going into the video game busines. Learning is like motherhood and apple pie. Everyone loves it and it gives them a warm feeling in their heart but ask retailers if it sells as well as games and they'd answer with a resounding "No." If you really think about the end consumer being a youngster who's just spent seven hours in school with math, spelling and reading;

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why is he going to go home and be anxious to sit down and do a spelling, math or reading program? For this reason, as well as others, "Learning Fun" category emphasizes the fun as much as the learning. Our first two entries, "Fun With Art" and "Fun With Music" are aimed at subject children like in school.

VG: Do you think the four categories you've developed reflect any changes in game players?

MK: "Learning Fun" is something that many hardware computer people are touting as the best use or reason for purchasing a computer. Texas Instruments advertising was based on this and, I'm sure Coleco for its Adam, Atari and IBM will be highly educational applications. So there's an interest in education that's being generated as much from the outside world as it is internally. But we want to be there as it grows even though we have some doubts about how quickly this is going to happen and how big it's going to ultimately get.

"Action-Strategy" games, on the other hand, should gain great strength and popularity in the coming months. In fact we tested this category with consumers back last April and found there was a definite interest in those creations which could somehow be a combination of pure action and pure strategy. It was an evolutionary category that had someone going for a "Pac-Man," "Donkey Kong" or "Space Invaders" to some decision making, but not going all the way to a "Temple of Apshai."

VG: What kind of player goes for that?

MK: The "video game nut" or someone who's trading up to a home computer for the first time and wants the joystick control but doesn't want all text, or a game that will take three or four hours to complete. Our strategy game profile (from information tabulated off our warranty cards) is older. They are the real computer buffs who have a disk drive or tape player, and buy our games in disk or tape format. They're often members of clubs and have friends who play "Temple of Apshai" for weeks. These people are somewhere between 18 and 39, so it is an older audience.

The action-strategy game players we expect to be very much like the video gamers ages 10 to 18, however this can be expanded to include players up to 30. With the educational category we're really aiming at parents in terms of our message, but the target audience is primarily children 6 to 12 years of age.

VG: What about "Temple of Apshai," why do you think its been successful for so long?

MK: "Dungeons and Dragons"-type games, or adventure-role playing games seem extremely popular. And there are so many options involved in the game as well as so many things that can happen. The number of chambers, amount of strength and personality you can build for the main character, as well as weapons, are all player considerations. It's really open-ended, and in the computer game area it seems that players want to be able to fantasize, be creative, or imagine themselves as part of the game.

VG: That's what people say is the attraction of laserdisc games. Do you have any plans to tap this area?

MK: We're looking into it now that we have people with better hardware backgrounds, such as Bob Brown, to keep us appraised and informed about what's happening hardware-wise that we might want to react to software-wise.

VG: How do you see your position now in the market?

MK: We're one of the independent computer software companies specializing in recreation or entertainment and learning. There are probably five or six strong entries, such as Sierra On-Line, Broderbund, and Datasoft. I would say, however, that by the end of this year we'll be in the top five, or in the top three or two of the independent computer software people who are in the non-business side of the category.

Each of those companies were started and are being run by programmer-game designer types who don't have a real marketing or business orientation. To their credit, they're now building better marketing and better business capabilities but that wasn't how they started.

VG: But what will happen as you get bigger? What is your vision for how this company will progress?

MK: We think we can grow very, very significantly. We think we can double each year for the next two or three. Our vision is to be more than just an entertainment software company. We want to work in areas of accessories and peripherals perhaps as it relates to hardware. We want to be the leading edge in terms of where software is going once we have the time to look into things such as laser disc technology.

We don't have a charter that really says "You guys are only entertainment and educational software and that's where you should stay." There's no reason why we can't move into home utility or productivity, or business either through internal development or through acquisition. But right now, the biggest volume being done in home comuter software is in the entertainment area.

We have a strategy niche and a very good reputation in it and that's going to grow because there's going to be more strategy games sold in the future than there have been in the past. And I think, in the home computer area, the strategy games where we're already established are going to become more and more important so we don't want to abandon this.

We also would like to find some proprietary areas. Software is kind of generic in that anybody can basically do a piece of software in a similar fashion compared to another company. So you've got the frustrations of not knowing when someone's doing something very similar to what you're doing or when you're going to be ripped off. It would be nice to have some proprietary areas too, where you know you're protected by patents, a long lead time or something else.

In the long run, Epyx is going to be opportunistic in terms of how we expand and how we diversify.

"... Our game design process is unique compared to many other companies. We're really driven by marketing. We develop games and software for specific categories and niches in the market..."

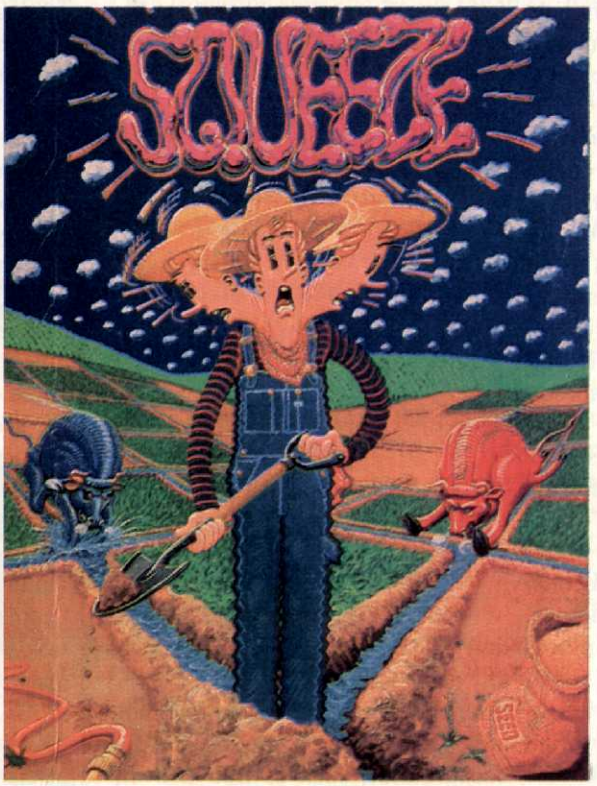
COMPUTER CORNER

Setting Sights on Sensational Software

By Mark Brownstein, Dan Persons, and Donald Richardson

You mean you haven't bought a PCjr yet? Oh, the $600 plus price tag for the basic system is holding you back. I don't blame you. After all, who's going to shell out that kind of money when you can get an ADAM, complete with printer and data pack drive, for the same price, or a Commodore 64 for as low as two hundred dollars?

That's pretty much what everyone said when IBM introduced the original PC. And, to a certain extent, they were right. The PC, for its price, really didn't offer anything that wasn't available on an Apple or a TRS-80. What everybody neglected to notice, though, was the one feature the PC had that no other personal computer in the world could boast: The IBM name.



That was enough. The PC moved both because of the prestige of its name and the fact that, in the unstable area of computer manufacturing, people knew that IBM wouldn't be closing its doors next week. Whatever its merits, the IBM PC soon became a major force in the business-oriented personal computer area, with sales big enough that soon other manufacturers were inspired to come with machines that were compatible with the PC's operating system and thus could use the PC's ever-growing software library.

Many experts contend that the same thing is now going to happen in the home computer field. No matter what its attributes, and in spite of its price, the PCjr is almost guaranteed to sell, and sell big, if only because people want the IBM name. As more and more PCjrs find their way into homes, and the amount of software for the machine grows, other manufacturers are going to jump on the bandwagon with their own PCjr compatible machines.

This doesn't mean much for the near future. Whatever computer you own still has quite a few years left in it. But, if all goes as predicted, eventually all machines will conform to the PCjr operating system. The disadvantage of this change will be that all computers currently on the market, Ataris, Apples, Commodores, and so on, will be rendered obsolete, instant antiques. The advantage will be that finally, software will be completely compatible from machine to machine. Vendors won't have to bother with releasing thirteen different versions of the same game, and consumers won't have to go wandering from store to store to find the one version that fits their machine.

All of that is way in the future however. In the meantime, we at *VG* still have to contend with the staggering volume of software products being released for every type of machine. If you have been regularly reading this column, you have seen our expansion to cover the Commodore 64 and the TI 99/4A (too late, alas, to help Texas Instruments).

Future issues will see the introduction of reviews for the TRS-80 Color Computer, as well as other systems that were introduced over the past year. As the field of home computing grows, so will we, in order to alert you to the best, most challenging software for all systems.

—Dan Persons

SQUEEZE

(Synapse Showcase Software/VIC-20 Cassette)

There's some sort of gibberish on the back of this game's instruction manual about a farmer digging irrigation ditches in a field full of bulls, but I wouldn't pay much attention to it if I were you. You're better off just popping the tape into your cassette interface, loading the game into your VIC-20, and enjoying Synapse Showcase Software's **Squeeze** for what it is: A good stripped-down adaptation of that arcade classic, Qix.

Irrigation ditches or not, your goal in this one-player game is to claim the entire screen by drawing lines that will enclose areas of the board. As you use your joystick to maneuver your character, whose name is Clem, around the screen, a white line is left behind him. When that line forms a closed figure, such as a square or any variety of more elaborate designs, the interior of the figure gets filled in and points are awarded according to the amount of area that you have claimed. Once an area has been filled in, Clem cannot move into it. He can only travel around the outlined perimeter, which remains onscreen even after areas surrounding the figure have been claimed.

This restriction to the outlines of figures becomes a serious factor in your character's survival. You see, in addition to Clem, there are up to six "bulls" onscreen that follow the paths you have left behind. Needless to say, any collision with a bull spells the end for Clem, and since you only have three lives to start with, with no bonuses available, avoiding a head to horn confrontation becomes the number one priority.

So while it's tempting to close off large areas of the screen in one stroke for big, big points (and, actually, that's the best way to get through the first round), in the end you'll live to regret it, since, with most of the board sealed off, Clem will have very few escape routes available to dodge the bulls. If you manage to claim the entire screen you're awarded with a dazzling visual display, and the game resumes with a black screen and faster, smarter bulls.

If you're looking for a letter perfect adaptation of Qix, then you'd better pass by Squeeze. There's no spiral deathtrap and, most important, no Qix. but if what attracted you to Taito America's arcade game was its central concept, the race to draw abstract shapes across the screen while avoiding impending annihilation, then Squeeze will fill the bill quite nicely. Considering the limited abilities of the VIC, designer Mark Bigelow has managed to get every last ounce of power from the machine's 5K memory. As a result, your adversaries are quick and, in the later waves, almost impossible to shake. And with six of them putting the "squeeze" on you, the game's no holiday. For your own sake, resist the urge to go for the big points on one fell swoop, and instead fill the screen with small boxes that will provide you with lots of escape routes when you really need them.

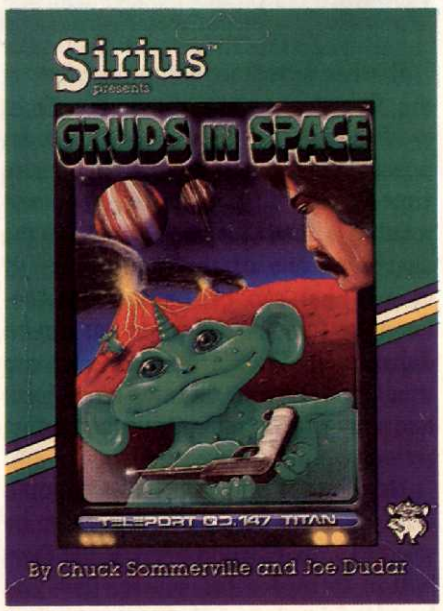
Just as Qix proved too abstract for most arcaders, Squeeze will not be for those players who want the simple motivations of a shoot'em-up or gobble game. But, like the original game on which it's based, Squeeze does provide an unusual, and somewhat subtle, challenge, along with a chance to flex one's creativity. According to a representative at Synapse, the company is planning to drop their line of VIC-20 games, If that's true, then I suggest that you hurry out and pick up a copy of Squeeze. This is a truly fine drawing game.

—D.P.

GRUDS IN SPACE

(Sirius Software/Apple Diskette)

The rather offbeat title of this game is a tip-off that there would be a lot of humor in the game. There is. The object of **Gruds in Space** is to travel from planet to planet on a special rescue mission. The reward is a million dollars.



Gruds in Space is an adventure game. In other words, it is text oriented—you have to give it an instruction, and it will either do what you ask, or give you one of many "I don't understand" messages. Game play is part trial and error, part intuition, and part luck. It can become frustrating at times. And it can take weeks to master.

What saves this from being just another boring, time consuming adventure game is the humor built in. Each new frame gets you a new graphic, many of them without any animation, some with limited movement. The horrible Venusian monster that ultimately kills you if you stumble in its path bears no resemblance to the picture on the screen—a cute little creature with a flower in her hair. Try swearing at the computer and it gives you a shocked answer.

Since there are numerous traps built in, you play the game on a backup disk. This disk is also used to store your game so far, so that you can resume later (or won't have to completely rebuild if you fall into a trap). Although the game has no connection to the real world, this is one adventure game that was involving to play and could, conceivably, hook a lot of people. The one minor flaw I encountered was a series of moves on Saturn which caused the keyboard to lock up, and required resetting the machine. Other than that, Gruds in Space is recommended as a first adventure game, or a new game for adventure addicts.

—M.B.

GATEWAY TO APSHAI

(Epyx Software/Atari ROM Cart)

Okay, I'm ready for the Indiana Jones Snake Haters Club. And, while you're at it, sign me up for the International Rat Detesters and the United Mummy Loathers. Granted there aren't many fan clubs for these creatures, but you don't know the true meaning of hate until you've encountered them in the **Gateway To Apshai**, Epyx's new ROM cart game for Atari computers.

The goal of this one-player action-adventure is to survive through eight levels of dungeons. At the beginning of the game, you are given three units each of strength, agility, and luck, as well as a

dagger and a set of leather armor. You are then permitted to select which dungeon you want to go through. With a choice of sixteen dungeons on each of eight levels, Gateway features a total of 128 different dungeons to experience.

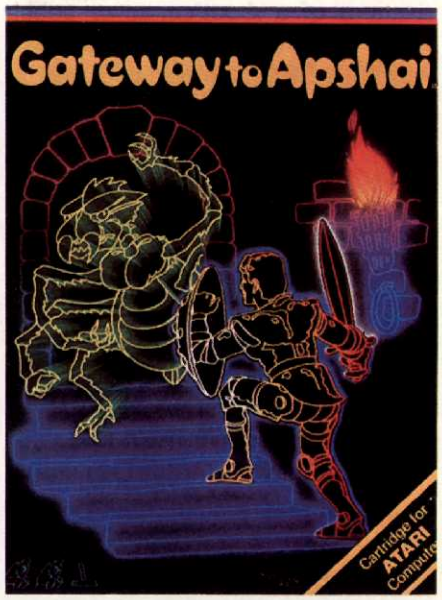
After picking your dungeon, your warrior will appear, standing in the dungeon's entrance room. The rest of the dungeon remains shaded, until you use your joystick to move your warrior into a shaded area. Then, the screen scrolls to keep up with your man, and the veil is lifted to reveal whatever delight, or horrors, wait for you in that particular room. Nasties range all the way from relatively harmless bats, to vicious snakes, rats, and mummies, to some sort of creature that moves so fast that I'm too busy defending myself to find out what it is.

Goodies fall into two categories. Treasures, such as crows and scepters, are represented on-screen by chests, and are worth different point values depending on what type of metal they're made of, gold, silver, etcetera. Items are objects that can be used during your quest and range from weapons such as swords, shields, bows and arrows, to different types of spells that can, amongst other things, freeze an attacker in its tracks, or send it fleeing from you in terror. In addition there are various types of charms and amulets that, say, increase your agility, or render you invulnerable for a limited amount of time.

However, items, once they have been picked up, can only be used when you are actually holding them in your "hand." This is done by getting the item out of the storage area that it is placed in when you pick it up. By pressing the *Option* key over and over, the items in your possession are displayed at the bottom of the screen, one by one. When the item you desire shows up, a press of the action button places the item in your hands. Some items, such as spells and healing potions are used immediately after the transfer, and can only be used once. Others, such as shields, gauntlets, and swords, when transferred become a part of your weaponry, and remain in effect for the rest of the game, unless they are superceded by a similar, but more powerful, weapon.

You start off the game with three items, which are always available for use. Keys open up the various locked doors (shown as a dotted line within a wall) that are encountered on each level.

This briefly reveals the hidden booby traps that are liberally sprinkled throughout the dungeon, and the search spell unmasks concealed doors that have been camouflaged as part of the dungeon's walls. These items can be activated by pressing the Select key to find the item you want and then hitting the action button. The *Select* key also summons up functions that allow you to drop any item that you don't want to hold onto, to move on to the next dungeon if you feel that you have exhausted the present one of all of its goodies, and to check on what items you're carrying, what weapons are in your arsenal, and the status of your health.



Battling a creature is done by pressing the *Start* key to put you in the Fight mode. Upon initial entry into this mode, pressing the action button will cause your warrior to swing whatever hand weapon is in his/her possession, be it the dagger or one of the many types of swords that can be found. Hand-to-hand (or foot, or claw) combat can be dangerous, since several blows are usually required to dispatch a creature, and some of the faster nasties can inflict serious wounds betweeen blows.

However, if you have lucked upon a bow and a set of arrows, these can be selected with a second press of the *Start* button (provided, of course, that you have perviously put them in your warrior's hands by using the *Option* key), permitting you to eliminate creatures from a distance by hitting the action button to shoot an arrow in the direction you're walking. The number of arrows in each set is extremely limited, though, so you might want to save them for the more implacable enemies.

A timer is always present at the upper right hand corner of the screen, counting down the time you have left in that particular dungeon. Although it is initially set to ninety-nine, in actuality you are given about six-and-a-half minutes to cover as much ground as possible. There's no penalty for remaining in the dungeon for the full-time limit, but moving on to the next level before the limit runs out may award you extra units of strength, agility or luck, as might killing a certain number of creatures.

Your warrior's initial health is the sum of his/her strength, agility and luck units. Encounters with creatures or with booby traps reduces health units. When the health units reach zero, your warrior loses one of his/her five lives. There are no bonus lives to be won, but well-timed applications of healing salves and potions, which restore health units, can keep your warrior hale and hearty almost indefinitely.

As complicated as all of his looks on paper, in actuality Gateway to Apshai's game play is quite straightforward. Granted, it takes a while for beginners to get used to the combination of joystick and three control keys (when you're trying to fight a giant tarantula you don't want to be fiddling around with buttons), but once you've got the system down it becomes almost second nature. The only problem with this setup is that the three control keys are located dangerously close to the *System Reset* key. You don't know what headache is until, with the mere flick of a finger, you've wiped out the work of a half hour when all you wanted was to summon up a healing potion.

But as easy as it is to handle the control system, that's how elaborate Gateway can be. With over sixty rooms for each dungeon, there are a total of over 7500 different rooms altogether, making the dungeons complex mazes that are almost impossible to memorize. The enemies are nicely varied, both in their method of attack and in their relative invulnerability to your weapons.

Although Gateway to Apshai weights its game play just slightly in favor of its

action elements, the combination of the adventure and action genres is nicely balanced. Die-hard action gamers may not find this their cup of tea. A good deal of time is spent wandering down paths that lead to fruitless dead ends. Yet, the game captures the true spirit of adventure, with untold riches and unspeakable dangers always seeming to be around the next corner. If you seek the fascination of an adventure game without the need to solve elaborate verbal puzzles, then you might consider stepping through the Gateway to Apshai.

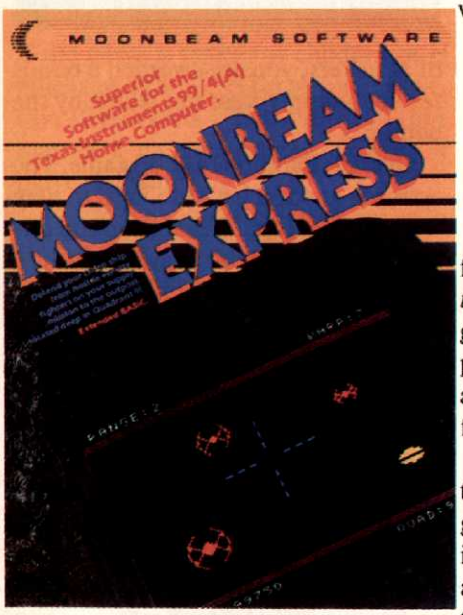
—D.P.

MOONBEAM EXPRESS

(Moonbeam Software/TI 99/4A)

Moonbeam Express is a Star Raiders-like game. The object is to clear nine quadrants of enemy ships. When all quadrants are cleared, you've beaten the game. But it isn't easy.

You start the game with one ship. As you play you guide it through combat, refueling, and asteroid zones. To start the game, you type the letter "C" onto your keyboard. This gives you the command computer, which tells you your distance from a refueling station, the



amount of fuel required to get there, and the number of enemy crafts out there. When you select your target quadrant, your ship will warp drive to that quadrant, as you watch your fuel levels dropping. Once there, the enemy will find you.

If you're in a hurry for information, typing the letter "R" will activate a short-range scanner, giving you information on the number of enemies in the sector, and how many are in range. Line them up in your cross hairs and blast them. If you sustain enough hits, they could knock out your phasers, your computer, or other essential items. Lose enough control or fuel, and the mission will automatically abort.

When you destroy an enemy ship, the graphics are very good—you get a Parsec-like explosion resembling Fourth-of-July fireworks. Probably the only real problem with this game is that you can't maneuver your ship and fire at the same time. Therefore, it takes some practice to be able to consistently aim and shoot at the enemy.

If you clear all enemies in a sector, you get to refuel. By pressing "F," you get the refuel screen. By positioning your ship in the exact center of the screen, they'll top off your tank. Since distances between fueling stations are great, you must plan your strategy to see that you can complete the mission without running out of fuel.

Moonbeam Express is a surprisingly good game. It's fun to play, there's plenty of action, and a lot of strategy is required. If you like Star Raiders, you will also like Moonbeam Express.

—M.B.

FINAL ORBIT/ BUMPER BASH

(Sirius Software/VIC-20 ROM Cart)

This cartridge is the first one I've seen for the VIC-20 that has two (count 'em *two*) entirely different games on it. It gives you a space game, and a neat little pinball simulation. Being something of a pinball freak, I'll review **Bumper Bash** first.

Bumper Bash is, as already mentioned, a pinball simulation. And it's a good one for the VIC-20. What you get is a very cat-like looking play field, with an adequate supply of bumpers, drop targets, and many of the other niceties of a good pinball game. Action is fast, you have good control of the ball release (spring tension is joystick controlled), and even have a number match for a last ball. Although it doesn't say so, I might even risk saying that the trigger button jiggles the machine.

The designer of Bumper Bash made good use of the single available controller: By moving it to the left, the left flipper flips, a move to the right controls the right flipper, and a pull straight back flips both flippers. If there are any major flaws (and this really isn't major), it may be that it all happens faster than a mechanical pinball game—the ball just *doesn't* drop that fast on a slow wooden table. If you're not looking for an exact duplication of a real wood and steel pinball machine, and would rather have fun on an abstract, electronic simulation, the cartridge may be well worthwhile for Bumper Bash alone.

But there's another game on this cartridge—**Final Orbit.** Final Orbit is another addition to a crowded catalog of space games. At the top of the screen is a radar screen, useful in locating the enemy. In the center is your view from the cockpit. When the enemy comes in-

to view, the cross hairs lock on, and all you really have to do is line up and fire. These turkeys fire back, so you've got to be careful not to miss, or quickly avoid their shots.

The idea is to somehow save the Earth, defeating the enemy (there are always fresh reserves there to attack), and somehow keep alive as long as possible. When you've lost your ship it's all over.

Final Orbit isn't a bad space game. It isn't a great one, either. But if you like space or pinball games (or both), this cartridge wouldn't be a bad addition to your collection.

—M.B.

LEARNING WITH LEEPER

(Sierra On-Line/Atari ROM Cart)

If you're between three and six years old, **Learning with Leeper** is definitely a game you would enjoy. Of course, if you're able to read this without mommy or daddy's help, you may not get as much out of the game.

Learning with Leeper provides four different activities. The first is a counting game, involving selection of the correct number of bones (on the right of the screen) for dogs (on the left of the screen). After a selection is made, the bones are handed out to the dogs. Each dog wags his tail as he receives his bone. If you choose too few bones, the dog barks (although you don't hear the bark), and the correct number flashes. It's a nice activity for learning to count from one to ten, but I wonder whether the child learns to recognize to match a *pattern* to a number, rather than an amount of dogs to a number (in other words, if you stacked the dogs horizontally instead of vertically, would the lesson stick?).

The second game is a nice little drawing game. You have a selection of four different pictures (a house with mountains in the background, a space shuttle, a lighthouse, and a princess (or witch, depending on how you color it). Along the bottom of the screen are color bars. To color in an area, you move the cursor to the bottom, select a color, move the cursor to the area you want filled in, and squeeze the trigger. One feature which expands the interest for adults is a line-drawing routine, which allows you to draw over areas which have already been colored, or fill in spaces drawn with your lines (for example, a TV antenna on the roof of the house, a clothesline on the side, and a green path leading to the door). Although the choice of colors is limited, some nice effects can be produced with this game.

Third is a shape and letter recognition activity. A balloon with a gondola floats over four shapes or letters. A fifth letter sits atop a platform on the right. This letter matches one of the four on the bottom. What you (or the child) must do is move the balloon onto (and pick up) the letter or shape that matches the one on the platform. When you do that, all letters float off screen and are replaced with a new set of letters.

The final game is called Leap Frog, a maze game which involves maneuvering the frog through an increasingly difficult series of mazes. As each maze is completed, you return to the menu screen. Each successive maze is more difficult than the one before it. The game is designed to help develop hand-eye coordination and conceptual thinking (planning the next move).

While researchers are becoming increasingly impressed by the educational value of video games (some have even gone as far as saying that games may be teaching certain skills which schools do less well), it's nice to see a good, playable preschool activity. The frustration level is relatively low, although you may need to experiment a bit to find a controller that a little hand can comfortably manipulate. If you have a young child at home, and an Atari 400-600XL-800-800XL-1200XL-1400XL or 1450XLD (have I missed any?), Learning with Leeper may be a good first game.

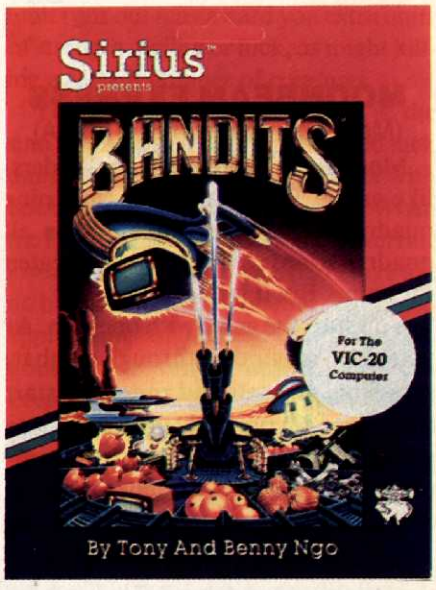
—M.B.

BANDITS

(Sirius Software/VIC-20 ROM Cart)

Bandits is a good game. The object is to maneuver your shooter left to right along the bottom of the screen, destroying the invaders who drop from above. The attackers travel in many different patterns and provide a challenge just to keep shooting them down. Besides just shooting a new wave of Space Invaders, however, is the great variety of attackers, each with slightly different maneuvers (my favorite is the Carrier, which drops annoying creatures who bounce around on the bottom of the screen until they get you or you get them. When you get them, their point value of 50 stays on the screen for a short time).

The object is to protect your supplies that are stored on the right of the screen. This can be anything from bananas and limes to skates. The remaining attackers in each wave wait on the left of the screen, waiting for their chance to go after you. To protect yourself you have a shield. If and when you defeat a wave of attackers, you are awarded a bonus for each supply item not stolen by the bandits.



Overall, Bandits is a good game. The action is good, it isn't too hard to play well, but can rapidly become quite difficult (keeping good players busy). I would recommend it for just about any game player.

—M.B.

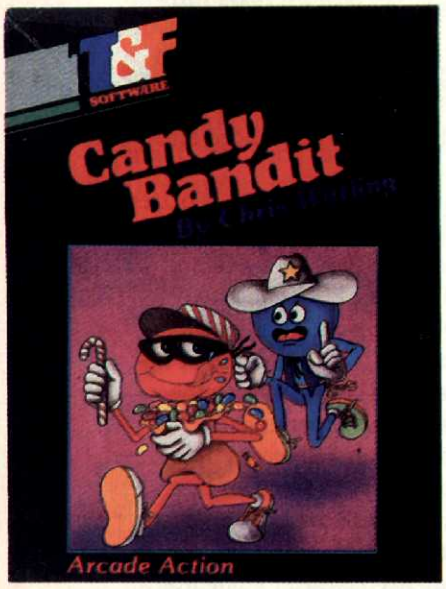
CANDY BANDIT

(T & F Software/Commodore 64 Disk)

I've been trying to figure out who **Candy Bandit** was designed for. The game involves a Candy Bandit, under control of your joystick, a sheriff, and numerous pieces of candy scattered along the levels of the playfield. Moving your bandit from floor to floor, picking up all the candy scores points. Once you pick up all the candy, you advance to the next level.

The walls (broken horizontal lines) are constantly moving. In order to go

from floor to floor, you must slip through the cracks in the walls. Unfortunately, the walls are sticky—if you touch them, your character is frozen there until a break in the wall rolls by. Unfortunately, your bandit moves much too quickly (or the walls scroll by too slowly) and he often gets stuck. The



sheriff has the ability to go through walls. Getting stuck is easy, getting caught by the sheriff is equally simple.

The graphics are very good. Each piece of candy *looks* like a piece of candy. The opening sequences (the bandit chewing gum) are well done. However, if the game is made for children, it is much too difficult. If for anyone above, say, 12 years old, it is still difficult, but may lack enough interest to keep a player returning.

If T & F had asked their designer to slow it down, making it a kid's game, Candy Bandit's chances of success would have been greater. As it is, it seems to miss the mark.

—M.B.

CAVERN QUEST

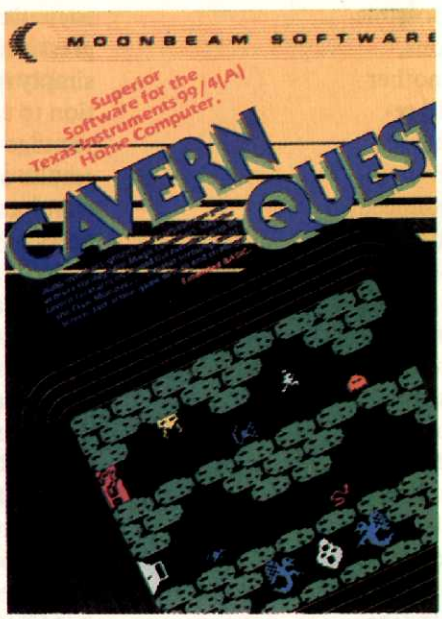
(Moonbeam Software/
TI99/4A Tape or Disk)

Cavern Quest is a fairly unique game-concept. The game is composed of three different screens. In the first screen, you must maneuver your player from right to left across the screen to a magic door. This screen has three levels, and requires running, jumping, and precise timing to avoid the bats hanging from the ceiling and the creatures who come after you. Getting across all the levels of this screen is not particularly easy. At higher levels it becomes nearly impossible.

If, however, you accomplish the impossible, you progress to a second screen, which is actually something of a bonus screen. What you must do is grab a vine which moves across the screen overhead, and drop onto the platform at the other end of the screen before the spider on that side reaches the top and grabs you. This is a matter of exact timing, but isn't particularly difficult.

The third screen is a magic chamber. This screen is where the bonus points really begin to add up. At the bottom of the screen is a treasure (there are 20 treasures in all). Alien creatures descend from top to bottom. If one reaches bottom, you return to screen one. In order to stop the creature, you must aim and throw a spear at the creature. If you hit all three, you get the treasure and earn the opportunity to go up against three faster creatures.

If you lose on any level (two or three) you return to a more difficult first screen. Graphics and sound are very well written, the game is more one of



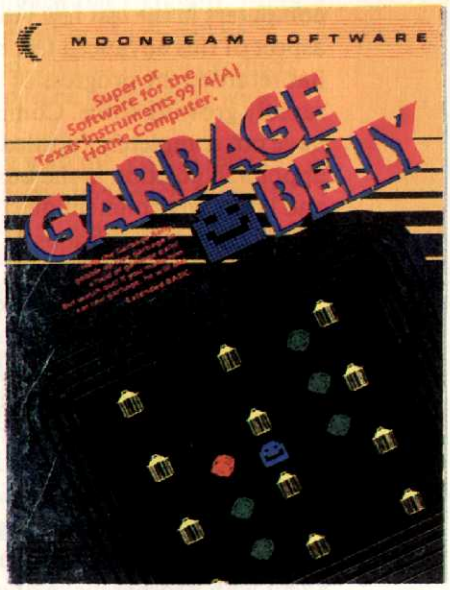
timing and learned maneuvers than one of strategy, but, given the scarcity of good games for this computer, Cavern Quest is a very good addition.

—M.B.

GARBAGE BELLY

(Moonbeam Software/TI99/4A)

If the title gets you, so will the game. **Garbage Belly** consists of three screens. The first screen shows three rows of garbage cans. Your character, garbage belly, must eat the "ripe" garbage as it floats by on the screen. As everyone knows, garbage is ripe when it's red, and not ripe when it's green. In order to



eat the ripe garbage, you must move belly over it. Get other garbage, and you've lost a belly. The faster a player clears this screen, the higher the bonus will be.

After clearing this screen, you advance to the "donkey kong" screen. In this screen, the letters to the word "GARBAGE" (what else?) sit at each end of a platform. You have to spell the word in order to advance to the next screen. Arrows shoot across the screen, so you've often got to hide on ladders to avoid the arrows. This screen requires speed, timing and strategy to complete.

The third screen is one that could be called the "Kaboom" screen. You must move the belly across the bottom of the screen, catching the bombs dropping from the top. Unfortunately, neither the bombs nor the belly are large enough to make accurate catches possible. It's very difficult to complete this screen, but you can earn extra points for each bomb caught.

Striking out in the second or third screen returns you to a faster first screen. Although the idea behind Garbage Belly may not sound, very, uh, appetizing, game play is sufficiently easy for most children, but challenging enough to keep older players entertained. Garbage Belly should make a nice addition to just about anyone's library.

—M.B.

VisiOn's Windows On The World

Despite the phenomenal growth of computers in the last few years, one aspect of this advanced technology has retarded the progress of this rapidly growing force. Computers have not completely fulfilled their appointed position in the business and home environment due to the often complex limitations of the machines.

The first personal computers functioned as an entity unto themselves, with little or no actual resemblance or connection to other computers. Each had its own commands, functions and procedures. Consequently, having learned how to operate one given computer didn't necessarily guarantee that an individual could be equally adept with another make of computer. In addition, the act of transferring information from one computer to another was a difficult procedure.

As computers have become more sophisticated, many of these problems have been removed. It's possible to integrate multiple applications, and moving from one job to another is less complicated. But up until recently, it was still not a complete process.

However, VisiCorp has announced a new applications system VisiOn, that will have an integrated applications environment, along with presenting multiple applications on the screen using the latest and most efficient methods of computer control.

In the past, this forward-looking company has introduced a wide range of computer innovations, including VisiLink, a system whereby selected information can be transformed over the telephone in the form of worksheets usable with VisiCorp software products; VisiFile, which stores records as diverse as a mailing list of inventory control; VisiSpell, for spelling accuracy, adaptable to the individual's prowess, and VisiWork, VisiCalc, and VisiDex. And with each innovations, VisiCorp has made in computer technology, it has taken the state of the art one step further toward the goal of ease and facility of use.

VisiOn is the product of considerable research and investigation. By correlating information regarding the function, control, communication and degree of expertise most valuable to a variety of users, VisiCorp created a system that is both advanced and functional.

The question of whether it is better for a computer process to be easy to learn, or easy to use, isn't a factor with VisiOn since it manages to balance both aspects. While being easy to learn, it is also capable of being up-scaled to conform with the users' wishes and experience.

There are several elements that make VisiOn easy to learn and use. For example, there are only nine English commands and a pointing device, called a "mouse." The user-interface is consistent, consequently, after the first application is learned, each user-interface becomes progressively faster. And data can be simply transfered from one application to another, with the added advantage of being able to view the results of different applications simultaneously on individual windows of the screen.

Although the applications are transferrable, each window is capable of displaying information and data divergent as a text in development to a line, bar, or pie-graph picturing the data's relationship. When the user moves the mouse to the selected window and presses the select button, the information in that application is displayed while the other applications are stored for future use.

An important aspect of VisiOn is the Common Bar. Located at the bottom of the screen, it has nine commands, including the invaluable "Help" command for the learning user. By using this command, the user will receive a display of options and their possible uses.

The "Open" command is used to create a window, while the "Close"

command removes a particular window after use.

The "Transfer" command allows the user to move data, using the mouse, from one application to another.

The "Frame" command controls the size and position of the windows and, with the mouse, places the window where wanted on the screen.

If an application is used often, the command "Scripts" will group the operation steps under one macrocommand, allowing the user to call the process forth with one step.

In addition to the command bar, each window has a function bar, which lists a particular applications commands on it, along with an individual "Help" command. This command bar is tailored to the particular process and is more detailed that the main command bar.

VisiOn is geared to the future. VisiCorp intends to use VisiOn as their applications standard. All of their present products will be modified, and all future products designed to be compatible with VisiOn.

Along with the VisiOn introduction, key products such as spreadsheet, word processing, data base management, graphic, will also be available. And VisiOn will be available on personal computers of other types. Multiple applications require 256K bytes of main memory and 620K bytes of disk space.

—By Donald C. Richardson

Extended Play

After 25 years as a leading manufacturer of board games, the Avalon Hill Game Company inaugurated its computer games division in 1980 with a modest five titles. However, since its inception, that number has increased until now, Microcomputer Games, Inc., produces over 40 titles in a variety of subjects and suitable for a wide range of equipment, including the TRS-80 and 80 Color, Pet, Apple, IBM PC, Atari 400 and 800, Commodore VIC and 64, Sinclair/Timex and TI-99/4A computers.

Calling itself the "thinking man's gamemaker," Microcomputer Games emphasizes strategy in games as divergent as those based on economics, business, war and sports. A few of the more innovative include:

- **Empire of the Over-mind.** This intriguing amusement for one sends the player on a quest of heroic proportions to defeat the cruel tyrant **(Over-Mind)**, who's usurped the throne from the lawful king.
- **Shootout.** Two years in the creation, **Shootout** is a satisfying combination of arcade excitement and Microcomputer strategy. The player attempts to withstand the invasion of 30 alien warships.
- **Andromeda Conquest.** One to four players compete in a race to build galactic empires throughout the solar systems in this complex space game.
- **Computer Stocks and Bonds.** The bulls and bears of Wall Street will line up to test their expertise in this interesting simulation of Big Board trading.
- **Computer Football Strategy.** As exciting as Sunday afternoon in the stadium, this thrilling version of the Avalon Hill board game calls upon the player to decide his team's defensive and offensive moves. It can be played against the computer or another armchair quarterback.

All Microcomputer Games software is between $16 and $35, and is available at game stores or directly from the company: 4517 Harford Road, Baltimore, Md. 21214, 301-254-5300; toll-free number for credit card orders: 800-638-9292. Making games that are fun to play is Microcomputer's objective. Playing them will continue to be yours once you test your skill.

—By Donald C. Richardson

Astrocade's Extended Play

By Mark Brownstein

Over the last year we've reported quite a bit on Astrocade, this in spite of the fact that the firm went belly up more than a year ago. In a recent issue, we presented reviews of Astrocade games—some of which were available before Astrocade's bankruptcy, and others which became available after the system's most recent demise.

That article prompted a great deal of interest from *Video Games* readers. So first, in response to your letters, the attached sidebar lists many of the major manufacturers of Astrocade software. Since we last reported, L & M Software has come out with a new cartridge game —Ms. Candyman. Mercifully, the game is a lot like Candyman, with enough features to fully stand on its own.

Although the title (and advertising graphic) makes one expect an Astrocade version of Ms. Pac-Man, the expectation is misleading. In Ms. Candyman, your heroine must travel through a "candy factory" gridwork, which is littered with Life Savers. Along the way, she must avoid the gremlins who are always after her. Ms. Candyman is a good game, well-worth the $29.95 (plus two dollars postage and handling) to an Astrocade junkie. The game has more than 20 progressively difficult game screens, three levels of difficulty, one or two player mode, a radar screen and a pause option.

As an L & M Software spokesman said: "We've got a great deal of money invested in this game. If it doesn't make it, we'll quit the business." Ms. Candyman would be a fine addition to any Astrocade library.

But the mere fact that there's another game for the Astrocade isn't the whole story. Jim Curran of Esoterica, Ltd., longtime Astrocade software house and distributor finally announced that (if you can believe this) the Z-Grass computer is available for the Astrocade. The computer will be pretty much as specified in earlier articles—a total of 100K memory, built-in speech, the Z-Grass language resident in ROM, and a full line of features to keep it right up there with the competition. Z-Grass is a special graphic programming language which makes it easy to develop exceptional video games.

In fact, special courses in the language have been held for video game designers, and Bally has most likely used the language to design many of its earlier arcade titles.

Since the Z-Grass unit was designed for the Astrocade, the unit is restricted to a low-resolution programming. The scheduled price for the computer addition should be around $600-700. Realistically, Esoterica doesn't expect to set any sales records with this product, partly because of its price, and partly because of the low-resolution (relative to other computers) that the Astrocade component limits it to. However, there is still a lot of interest in getting good games for the Astrocade. Perhaps buying the Z-Grass computer will pay for itself with the first game you sell. Who knows?

Esoterica will also be marketing a high-resolution, state-of-the-art Z-Grass computer. This computer will presumably be capable of designing high-resolution games for other systems. Lest you get the wrong impression of what the computer will do, let us say that the computer will be CP/M compatible, making it capable of performing business and entertainment computing, will have the interfaces necessary for connection to other computers and peripherals, and will also be able to perform just about any function of other computers. According to Esoterica, the computers are expensive but worth every penny.

Finally, we get to look at Astrocade itself. At the time of this writing, the rumors were running pretty fast and furious. True to form, Ray George, Astrocade's vice president and invisible man, was not available for a telephone interview. Without an Astrocade confirmation or denial, we present the following for what they are—just hearsay (we have them on good authority, but so far nothing has been confirmed).

Rumor 1: Astrocade is about to go out of Chapter 11 (bankruptcy) and get back into business.

Rumor 2: A new company is about to invest a sizable amount into the company.

Rumor 3: Some of the major Astrocade software developers have been approached by interested parties to develop software for the now rejuvenated Astrocade.

This is what I guess *may* happen: Some third party (possibly a major creditor or two) will pay off Astrocade's other creditors at a bargain rate (nickels on the dollar for actual debts). This new company will take over some percentage of control of the company.

The thousands of units that were either not shipped or returned to Astrocade (and were, in effect bought back by Astrocade or the third party) can now be sold at a rock bottom price (probably less than $50-60). This should reduce all existing stock (Astrocade fans around the country will probably welcome the opportunity to get a discount spare unit and sales will be brisk). The system will be marketed as a bargain super system (aside from the low-res graphics, it really was years ahead of its time).

Meantime, with the sudden rush of money from sales of the sold units, Astrocade will be able to manufacture the already redesigned Astrocade unit, which is much less costly to manufacture; or may develop a high-resolution unit of their own at a price comparable to the Atari VCS. This new unit may provide the option of play in either a high or low-resolution mode—a feature which none of the other dedicated units will have. A keyboard may also be added (not the Z-Grass), allowing easier game programming, and true computing capabilities.

At the same time, Astrocade may possibly break into Europe with relatively inexpensive European units. The sales of bargain hardware will generate the interest in software. Astrocade will liquidate its existing software at similar bargain rates, while encouraging third parties to continue to develop new games for the system. Astrocade will also exercise its options on a number of Bally/Midway arcade titles.

Although it's only speculation (many people have been burnt by poor support of the units, many dealers have been burnt by poor sales or slowly moving stock), some or all of the above may occur. The Astrocade is still a good system with an unbelievably strong following. And it may stay around for some time to come.

Bally Professional Arcade (Astrocade) Software and Information Sources

The companies listed below are primary sources of information, or manufacturers of cassette-loaded (and a few ROM cartridge) games and activities for the Bally Professional Arcade (Astrocade). This information carries no endorsement from *Video Games Magazine.*

Documentation:

The Arcadian published since 1978, provides tutorials, programs, news of hardware/software developments for the Arcade; reviews of current software and special exclusive offers. Published 11 times a year, subscription rate is $12.50/year. To order write: Robert Fabris, 3636 Morrie Dr., San Jose, CA 95127.

Astrocade Sourcebook published twice yearly, provides listings of available programs, descriptions of products available for Arcade, catalog pages for hardware/software manufacturers, and other valuable information for Arcade users. $8.00 per issue. Order from RMH Enterprises, 635 Los Alamos Ave., Livermore, CA 94550.

Software:

Esoterica Ltd.
P.O. Box 614
Warren, OH 44485

Anderson Research and Design
2206 West 21st Street
Minneapolis, MN 55118

George Moses, Co.
P.O. Box 686
Brighton, MI 48116

L & M Software
8599 Framewood Dr.
Newburgh, IN 47630

New Image
59420 Nine Mile Road
South Lyon, MI 48178

Super Software
Box 702
Plainfield, NJ 07061

The Tiny Arcade
Box 1043
Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44223

Wavemakers
Box 94801
Schaumburg, IL 60192

—Mark Brownstein

TAKE A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY
Rock's Video Wiz Ros Valory Talks About The Game

By Charley Crespo

"Coast to coast, border to border, Journey is breaking every kind of conceivable record," said Herbie Herbert, manager of the San Francisco Bay area-based rock quintet. "The group has not only established new attendance records, but fastest sellout, highest gross and most nights played records as well."

On the strength of two hits, "Separate Ways" and "Faithfully," off the band's tenth album in ten years, *Frontiers*, Journey began an 89 concert tour in Seattle in March, 1983. Recently, *Video Games* caught up with Journey at the conclusion of their tour in Hawaii and talked with Ros Valory, the band's 35-year-old bassist and video wiz about the Journey games.

Video Games: Weren't you the one who introduced Journey to video games?

Ros Valory: We've been going to Japan for four years and seeing a lot of things over there before being introduced here, or at least in greater abundance or variety. Steve Smith (Journey's drummer), his wife and I found this Defender game in an aracade game room, and I got him hooked. Since then, he's gotten into it enough to where he bought his own machine. He bought a Defender and a Stargate arcade game. Now we've had Defender on the road with us for two years and it comes backstage in a road case. And no quarters!

VG: Tell us about the Journey games.

RV: The first Journey game was from Data Age. It came out just after Christmas, 1982. The object of the game was that each member of the band, represented by a little multicolored figure is running up the screen through obstacles and barriers consisting of groupies and photographers. The player, aided by crew members or the manager, must ultimately get them to the Escape vehicle. It's not an easy game to play; it takes some skill. I guess it would be suited for all age groups.

VG: And the Bally game?

RV: That is a lot different. Each of the five people involved on the screen have a different little world from which they must escape. In the game, Neil Schon (guitarist) has a jet pack on his back, and his actual face and arms are seen moving and traveling on this little figure. He's going through this cave, and you've got to get all the way to the bottom and then shoot your way out. Jonathan Cain (guitarist/keyboardist) has to walk down these little ramps and jump over little floppy things that are coming at him. You have to get him all the way to the bottom to his piano. Steve Perry (vocalist) goes through a maze of little swinging microphone doors that are moving up in waves. You have to squeak through those and then shoot your way out while he's singing. I go through a maze of telescoping blocks that catapult you further up the screen until you land on another block. Then at the top, I've got to shoot my way through discs that are coming at me until I make it to the bottom of the screen. Steve Smith bounces on different colored drum skins; the idea is to at least turn them all blue by hitting them once or making them all disappear by hitting them twice and landing on top of the drum set.

After you get all five through their little mazes on the second game, the band then appears on stage in front of an audience. All the people in the crowd are trying to run through one of three doors while you're playing, and there's a figure of Herbie Herbert, our manager, in front of those three doors, running back and forth trying to keep them out. Eventually, they all get on stage and the band runs away, and it gets pretty crazy.

So, there's a little more involved than the Data Age game. It's more challenging, there's a lot more color, more thought was put into it and, of course, the machine can hold much more information than the little Atari cartridge. The prototype was with us on the road, but it broke down some time ago and I haven't seen it since. I don't know whether Bally is continuing on the project right now or whether they're halted by the fact that they have some kind of deal with Data Age.

They were given the information for the program of the Data Age game and therefore Data Age thinks they have a piece or entitlement of our Bally deal, even though all the information on the Bally machine is different. In other words, the information was offered but not used, so I don't know what's going on at that end either.

The basic thing behind the game, though, is that we're the first people to put out a game. I mean, Elton John has done Captain Fantastic pinball, but it was basically artwork, there was nothing different about the game. Also, the Journey games are unique in that they don't have a kill-or-be-killed mentality about them.

So there's some innovation; new trends have been set. I'm not sure about the success of either of these two machines. Recently Data Age went bankrupt. And since there's some connection between them and Bally—I'm not sure what it is—I don't know how much of that game is even still selling, maybe what's in stock is all. Maybe they declared Chapter 11 so they could stay in business. I think the Bally game will be popular, probably more with kids than us older vidiots. ▲

Photo courtesy of CBS

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BOOK BEAT

Reading Up On The Timex/Sinclair Computer

By Richard Goodwin

These days you can walk into a department, toy or electronics store, and pick from any number of computers with any number of features, available at any number of prices. At the lower end of the spectrum is the Timex/Sinclair, a scaled down, almost toylike home computer, billed as the best introduction to computers for the non-technical user.

OK, I admit it, I'm non-technical. I have trouble changing light bulbs, but the Timex/Sinclair is just too much like a toy for my tastes. It has a membrane keyboard and when touching it, I feel like a cashier at McDonald's. There is barely enough memory, 2K, for it to do very much but I suppose there are people out there who want to get a feel for these machines and the T/S is certainly harmless looking.

Just in case people want to know what to do with their new toy, a variety of publishers have provided guides, proving that the machine is more versatile than you might imagine. I still don't like the machine but now I have a grudging respect for it and its designers.

Randomly selected from the growing T/S bookshelf, here are three different volumes that show what the machine can do and how you can fill hours with games and adventures.

The first offering is an appealing little book called *Time Lost* by Joseph Girratano, Kris and Arlan Andres (Que Corporation,131 pages, $5.95). It's the first in a projected series, by this trio of computer whizzes. Kris Andrews is a 17 year-old high school student who loves science fiction and art and has provided the basic story and artwork for the first volume. He introduces us to John Moore, a teenager, his seven-year-old sister Erin and a time traveller named Jacquris Van Ness before Andrews whips us along on a roller coaster adventure. There are six convenient cliffhangers allowing players to put down the book and program the accompanying games into the T/S and play along.

While the color comic story doesn't stop, the back end of the book contains the surprisingly short and easy-to-understand programs in BASIC, of course. This way you can save John and friends from the Slime Creatures, Cavvern Monsters and other such adversaries. The games are straightforward but there are enough options to amuse you for awhile.

As a comic story, we are treated to cliche-ridden situations, poor dialogue and very bad artwork. The pages are reduced to fit the small size of the book, (4¼"x 6½") but there's far too much wasted space which may have allowed Andrews more leeway on the art. The lettering is also shaky and appears to be done by someone who has just learned penmanship and practiced by doing the book. On the other hand, Andrews is to be commended for some attention to developing characterizations and nice touches about Jacquris and the future.

The book ends on a cliffhanger, forcing you to buy the next book but at least the games don't leave you hanging.

The programming section of *Time Lost* is quite instructive with sections detailing the program, how you can alter the program and some suggested changes. Arguably the best thing about the book is the "How They Work" section which give you a line-by-line description of what the program is doing. I can think of no better short course in the workings of programming than these six explanations.

In addition to learning about the computer, you also get a brief history of Stonehenge which is a nice touch. Now, if Andrews can keep his characters from saying, "Gad!" and learn to draw, the

"There's something exciting and, at the same time, frightening about attempting to write a book of game programs . . . ."

series would be a addition for T/S users.

Another challenge is wading through Bill L. Behrendt's introduction to his *30 Games for the Timex/Sinclair Computer* (Prentice-Hall, 84 pages, $10.95). He spends the first several pages going into minute detail as to why he dislikes the machine but has learned to love it—perhaps because he's getting paid to write a book about it.

"There is something exciting and, at the same time, frightening, about attempting to write a book of game programs. . . .Now, with the book completed, the emotions remain in balance. All along the way, the balance was tipped one way or another; often changing sides many times a day. At any rate, it is with this final equilibrium that I submit this compilation of programs to you, the reader." How nice.

Given 30 games, all nicely detailed in bold type for the nearsighted, there is a hodge-podge of good, interesting and down-right boring games. Behrendt has broken them down into *Games of Skill; Chance and Fortune; Technology Tamers* and *Just for Fun*. In theory, they should all be just for fun because with 2K, you can't get into any really deep and thought-provoking game play.

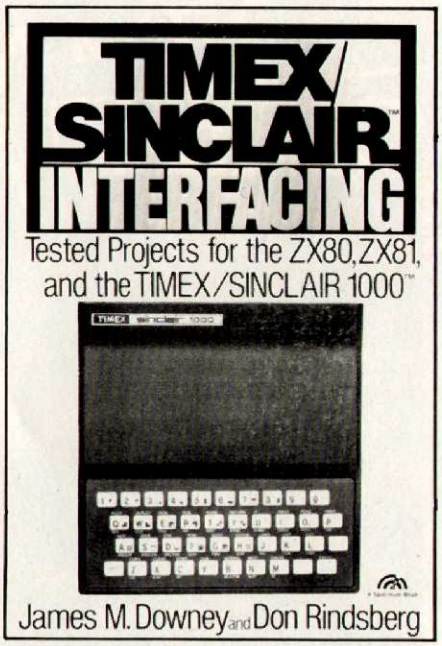
Behrendt has a tendency to get cute with his game titles and situations but a number of his premises are good. I particularly like *Docking in Deep Space*, where you must dock with the mother ship, but your little starcraft has suffered damage and your errant engine makes staying on course difficult.

Also worthy of note is *Nuclear Reactor* where you must control damping rods or cause a meltdown. In these days of nuclear worry, you finally have a game allowing you to do something about nuclear proliferation.

Then for fun, there's *Catbot*, a robot cat-chases-mouse game that allows you to move at eight different speeds, keeping the challenge fresh for an extended period. And for would-be bookies, there's *Lucky Number* that delves into numerology.

But for all good games there must come bad ones. The worst offender is *Ecosystem* which simplifies our ecological food chain to another cat and mouse game. It's incredibly boring because there are no random moves and once you learn the solution, the game is over forever. Then there's *Consulting the Oracle* where Behrendt recommends a brief study of the I Ching philosophy before playing. Hey, this is the T/S we're talking about and the game won't be worth the research required.

Behrendt also strikes out with *Liar, Catchem* and *Robot Attack*, the latter allowing you just to plant hidden mines and sit back and wait for an attacking robot to either blow itself up.



There's enough to keep you occupied for awhile, but by the time you have entered and sampled all 30 games, you will have decided that it's time for a better system or computers are not for you.

Not only is the T/S a learning tool, it can be used as a building block for expanded memory and an assortment of peripherals usually reserved for the bigger systems. To learn how this can be done, and how you can do it at your father's workbench, James M. Downey and Don Rindsberg offers us *Timex/Sinclair Interfacing* (Prentice-Hall, 146 pages, $10.95).

The problem with the book is that, unlike most of the other T/S tomes, it gets into the guts of the machine with a vengeance and requires a certain aptitude and expertise with hardware just to get past the opening chapter. Now, as I stated earlier, this is foreign territory.

The book serves two purposes, however, explaining how the hardware makes the software run and how you can build upon the hardware yourself. For *Video Games* readers, the first purpose is the most interesting because they give you all the basics you may ever have an interest in knowing. In my case, it had more technical explanations than I would ever *care* to know.

As a textbook, it does a very nice job in explaining each and every piece of the hardware. Since the T/S is a classic example of how to streamline a computer system, the hardware explanations set the ground work for further learning—if you are so inclined.

Still, the writing is too dry and technical with no color provided to keep the casual reader interested, which is a shame considering many casual readers won't get past flipping through it at the bookstore. Also, the graphics and layouts make it look like a test and not something you would *like* to read.

Of special note to our readers is Chapter Seven which discusses joysticks and how to build your own analog versions. The explanations on building objects is punctuated with ordering information for the hard-to-get materials, a plus for any small town readers.

To get a better sense of the validity of this book, I called in the aid of a far more technically-oriented computer buff, who flipped through it and offered that the suggested approach in building a lot of the equipment or wrap wiring may have been replaced by a new technique so be warned. Learning the techniques in this book will not get you a job but it certainly will help you get started learning how it's all done.

In all, the Timex/Sinclair is a durable system that has a short lifespan and may make for the best introduction to the home computer world. As for the books, some are worth checking out and learning while others, well, they can best be saved for those fans with *special* interest. Me, I keep saving for something big and expensive and *simple* to use. ▲

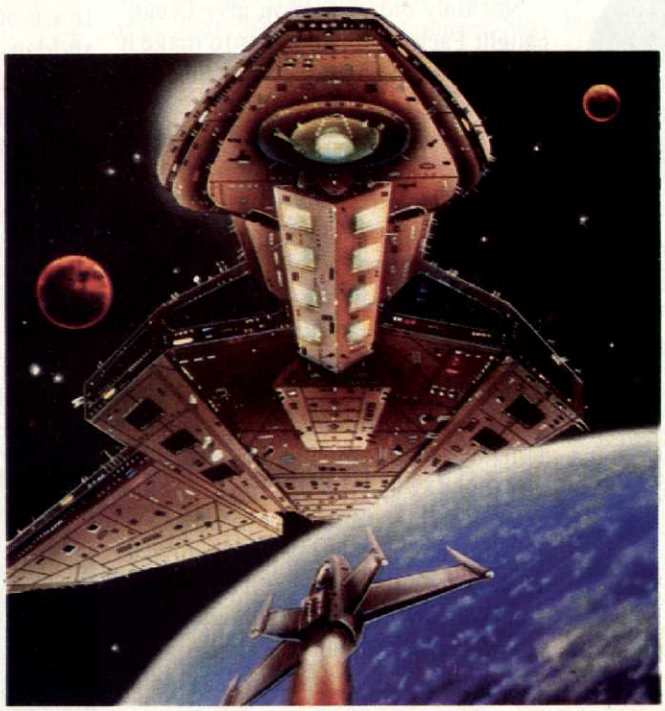
SOFT SPOT

Home Carts Spring Into Action

By Dan Persons, Mike Sittnick, Ted Salamone and Mark Brownstein

A couple of months ago, you may have noticed an item in Blips, and no less than two seperate advertisements, for the Vidco Copy Cart. This hand-held device, according to the ad copy, allows you to "programme, erase, then reprogramme Vidco games at a fraction of the cost." No, that doesn't mean that you can create your own video games for less than what Atari or Activision has to pay in development costs. What it does mean, however, is that you can take the supplied 2600 compatible game cart, insert it in one end of the Vidco device, place a "Copy Cart" in the other end and, with the push of a button, copy the game into the Copy Cart.

And why, you ask, should you want to copy a game that you already own? Simple. The Vidco Dishaster cartridge that comes with the video game recorder (or VGR) was actually manufactured by Zimag, a company that went under before they even had a chance to release their games. Are you catching on? Let me make it clear: The "Vidco" game carts do not have some special feature that allows them to be duplicated. They are just regular games that Vidco snapped up at bargain basement prices. What that means is that the VGR, in spite of the vague wording of the ads, is not restricted to only copying games supplied by Vidco, at least in theory it could work on any game cartridge available.



Dreadnaught Factor

I am not about to get down on Vidco for coming up with a video game duplicating machine. I'll leave the right and the wrong of that up to your own morality and the judgement of the courts. But, not having had any hands-on experience with the Copy Cart, I do have some questions. First, from the few reviews that I have read of the Zimag carts, one of the biggest criticisms was that the games were too simplistic, with not enough variation in game play. This suggests to me that the cartridges relied on the standard 2K memory allotment that the Atari 2600 was originally designed for. But, as savvy 2600 gamers know, the best games have been coded into memories that range from 4 to 8K, and utilize custom designed bank switches to "fool" the 2600 into reading the extra memory. So while the VGR might work fine on such games as Air-Sea Battle and Laser Blast, can it handle the extended memory and specialized programming of, say, Asteroids or Omega Race?

If it can't, then is it worth the cost of the VGR package to be able to dupe only 2K carts? That depends. If you're thinking of buying the package in order to build a game library by duping your friend's games onto separate Copy Carts, think again. Many 2K games are now being sold off for between five to fifteen dollars. At $49.95 for the VGR system and $15.95 for each additional Copy Cart, the Vidco alternative is no bargain. But if you're the type that plays a game for a few weeks and then consigns the cart forever to the back of your closet, and if you don't mind the possibility that your selection of games may be severely limited, then duping a game onto the one Copy Cart supplied in the package and then reusing that cart when the game loses its appeal may eventually save you a few dollars.

Unfortunately, until more is known about the abilities of the Copy Cart system, it's hard to tell what value this product would be to the home gamer. The strangely worded advertisement claims that, with this product, "you can benefit yourself and become a master of the game world," but from what I can see, the only people who are guaranteed

of benefitting from the Copy Cart are the founders of Vidco International.

—Dan Persons

DREADNAUGHT FACTOR

(Activision/Intellivision)

This Activision game for Intellivision takes an old theme: The scrolling shoot-out with bombs and lasers, and adds enough twists to make it seem fresh. This is one case where the entire theme of the game adds to the total play as much as graphics and playability.

Yes, the evil aliens are at it again, trying to blow up your dear home planet;

and yes, it is just your little ship against a giant space fortress that is bigger than the TV screen. But this is where the similarity between **Dreadnaught Factor** and other games such as Scramble and Zaxxon ends. In Dreadnaught Factor, the player is allowed to make several runs over the intruding fortress. Most of the damage the player inflicts on the ship's weaponry is retained on subsequent runs.

But David has only so much time to slay Goliath. While the player is bombarding the ship, it is moving closer to the planet. If the player takes too long destroying the mighty Dreadnaught, it will get close enough to the planet to release its deadly missile. However, the player can slow down the speed of the Dreadnaught by destroying any number of its four engines, though inertia will keep the space fortress moving towards the planet anyway, but at a slower rate.

To destroy the Dreadnaught, there is no single robot to kill, or "mystery base" to destroy, as in Zaxxon, Scramble, and others. Nor will mere quantity of shots stop it, as in Empire Strikes Back. Sixteen separate vents must be bombed to annihilate the Dreadnaught, and the player gets not three or five, but *ten* ships to complete the task. Moreover, there are a fixed number of Dreadnaughts to destroy. Conquer the number for the skill level being played, and you actually win! There are enough skill levels, however, to remain a challenge for any player, who may choose to battle anywhere between one and one hundred Dreadnaughts. This game, though inspired perhaps by the original scrolling shoot-outs, is no carbon copy.

Most of the changes, in fact, are appropriate for the home screen. Obviously, nobody wants to play an arcade game they can win for too long when they pay for each play; and no arcade game gives a player ten ships to start with.

Not only did Activision give Dreadnaught Factor enough twists to make it more interesting, but they followed through on graphics and play mechanics as well. The graphics are fluid, detailed, and well-done. The responsivenes of the controls was perfect, even for the finicky disc. Attention to detail was made in every department. For instance, every time an engine on the Dreadnaught is destroyed, the background engine noise gets softer.

Dreadnaught Factor is one of the first games by Activision that was originally designed for the Intellivision machine. These new, original games have been excellent and are a big improvement over the Atari adapted Pitfall and Stampede titles. Dreadnaught Factor is an original game with an original concept that is the best of its type available for Intellivision.

—M.S.

TREASURE OF TARMIN

(Mattel/Intellivision)

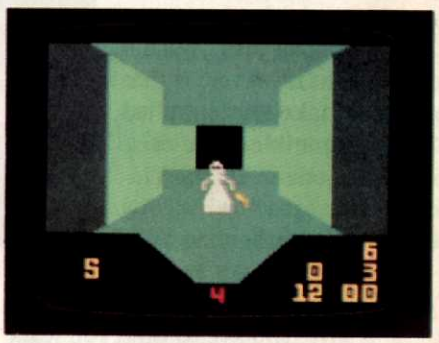
With this offering, Mattel has created a tour de force, the likes of which have never been seen before for "mere" dedicated home game machines. It is more closely related to true computer games such as Wizardry or Necromancer, than it is to anything else for game machines. Anyone who finds detailed and thought provoking games fun, will love this one.

The labyrinth is composed of thousands of rooms, all potentially containing a wealth of treasures, weapons, or enchanted items. There are also numerous evil beings waiting to do you in before you confront the ultimate evil—The Minotaur. It is he, and he alone, who guards the fabulous **Treasure of Tarmin** you are risking life and limb for.

As you work your way deeper and deeper in search of the treasure, you must arm yourself with weapons you find lying about the mazes. You can also find armor and potions which will aid you in your quest. Each thing encountered in the rooms (except for the Minotaur) comes in numerous levels of strength and resiliency. Since your pack can only hold six items, you must constantly trade off items in an attempt to provide yourself with a proper balance of the strongest items available. Only through use of shrewd planning and a touch of lady luck will you survive the sudden confrontations with the beasts of the dark.

A single game can last for five minutes, or several hours, depending upon the level of difficulty chosen. The only thing missing in the longer games is the ability to save the action and pick up where you left off several days later. That aside, this cart represents a landmark in the evolution of home games.

While detailed, the game is not overly complex; nor does the action suffer any from the alleged foibles of the disc



controllers. It offers all the advantages, and none of the disadvantages of the Intellivision system.

Seeing as how this first person draws you into the action, I have to recommend it to everyone, not just adventure buffs. Without a doubt, this is Mattel's best effort yet.

—T.S.

CONGO BONGO

(Sega/Atari 5200)

The first thing noticed about this game is the catchy jungle tune playing throughout both screens. It's a funky rhythm which greatly exhances the playability of this Sega 5200 cart. Pleasing, but not distracting or unnerving, the

music is just one of several nice touches.

The eye-grabbing visuals stand out next. Only slightly altered, the display angle and graphics are an excellent translation from the arcade hit. Though there is heavy use of earth-toned hues, the colors are striking. The second screen (the Great River) is mostly a deep ocean blue contrasted by a lavish jungle green and more of the browns so prevalent in the first screen.

This is a one or two player game, the

object of which is to treat Congo to a well deserved hotfoot. In the first screen, he hurls coconuts at the player's on-screen persona. One hit is instant death for any of the three safari types that begin the adventure.

The second scenario entails good timing and extremely accurate use of those deplorable, non-centering joysticks. Leaping onto lily pads, hippos, islands, and fish, the player attempts to cross the wide waters. This is easier said than done because the stick has to be pointed in the direction of the desired jump. Once the jump is executed the gamer must immediately center the stick, for our adventurer continues moving in the direction the stick is aimed. This is very tricky, since being off just a hair readily proves fatal. The difficulty encountered here can be remedied with use of a self-centering replacement controller.

As the game progresses, the challenge increases. The monkeys scampering about jump on the explorer's back. Two of them can even gang up on him to throw him off a cliff on a fast trip to oblivion. Besides some fast maneuvering, the player's only defense is to make his character jump up and down three times to dislodge the simians. All this action is timed by a decreasing bonus potential. If the bonus counts down to zero, the figure in use dons a halo and reports to the Pearly Gates. There's no time to make friends with beasties!

The joystick problem aside, the game itself is a very amusing change of pace from others available for the Super-System. The advancement to the second screen is done in a particularly enjoyable fashion, and the jaunty manner of the player's alter ego is good enough to keep that safari fever alive. —*T.S.*

TIME PILOT

(Coleco/2600)

Maybe it's the law of averages. Or perhaps it's just that somebody at Coleco has finally "seen the light." Whatever the reason, it appears that Coleco, a company notorious for the poor quality of its Atari 2600 game adaptations, has finally awakened to the reality of today's competitive game market. The result is this adaptation of Konami's **Time Pilot:** A Coleco cart that's not a waste of money!

The goal of this one or two-player game is simple enough: Pilot your jet through five different time periods, blasting as many enemy aircraft as possible, while avoiding collisions with either the enemy or the missiles they fire. Your plane always remains at screen center, while the cloud strewn background and the enemy planes scroll in a direction appropriate to the one your plane is facing towards. To change course, you need only point your joystick in the direction that you wish your plane to face, and it will automatically rotate to that direction. A quick flick of the action button fires a missile that can travel the full length of the screen. Holding down the button fires a rapid series of shots that travel a considerably shorter distance.

The time periods that you must contend with are 1910, where the enemy consists of slow moving Fokker biplanes; 1940, which pits you against slightly faster WWII monoplanes; 1970, featuring unpredictable helicopters; 1983, where you are evenly matched against swarms of enemy jets; and 2001, in which you must blast speedy, aggressive flying saucers out of the night sky.

To advance from one time period to another, you must first destroy enough enemies to completely eliminate a line of planes depicted in a box at the bottom of the screen (each plane in the line represents four enemies to be destroyed). Once that is done, a large mother ship appears. In 1910, it's a dirigible, in 1940 it's a heavy bomber, 1970 has a double-prop whirlybird, and so on. Blast the mother ship and your plane is whisked off to its next challenge.

Time Pilot starts you off with five planes. Bonus planes are awarded for every ten thousand points scored. The difficulty switches set the game for either one of three skill levels, which essentially vary in the number of planes you have to shoot down before advancing to the next time period, or to the only two-player variation available.

I always feel much better reviewing a well-done game as opposed to one that obviously was carelessly designed but, to this point, Coleco's 2600 adaptations have given me very little reason to smile. It becomes a true cause for celebration to discover that Time Pilot is well designed and quite challenging. Admittedly, the graphics don't have the same 3D feel as the Konami original, nor can you pepper the screen with missiles as you can in the arcade game.

However, the unique joystick control is an effective alternative to the old

"right for clockwise, left for counter-clockwise" set up usually seen in these types of games and allows you to easily execute the weaving, left and right maneuver that is the preferred attack strategy of seasoned Time Pilots.

Although the enemies move in unison, rather than following their own, independent flight paths, they still exhibit unique personalities for each time period, with the enemies from 1970 on being particularly aggressive. In fact, anyone who has not developed the fine art of evasive maneuvering can not even hope to survive past 2001, where the saucers move faster than your plane and can actively track your movements.

Coleco's Time Pilot is no major breakthrough in video game concepts but, then again, neither is the arcade game upon which it is based. In bringing the game home, the designers at Coleco

have successfully captured the feel of the Konami original. 2600 owners who are already fans of Time Pilot, or who just would like a good, no-nonsense shoot'em-up, will not be dissappointed with this version. Congratulations, Coleco. Welcome to the fold.

—D.P.

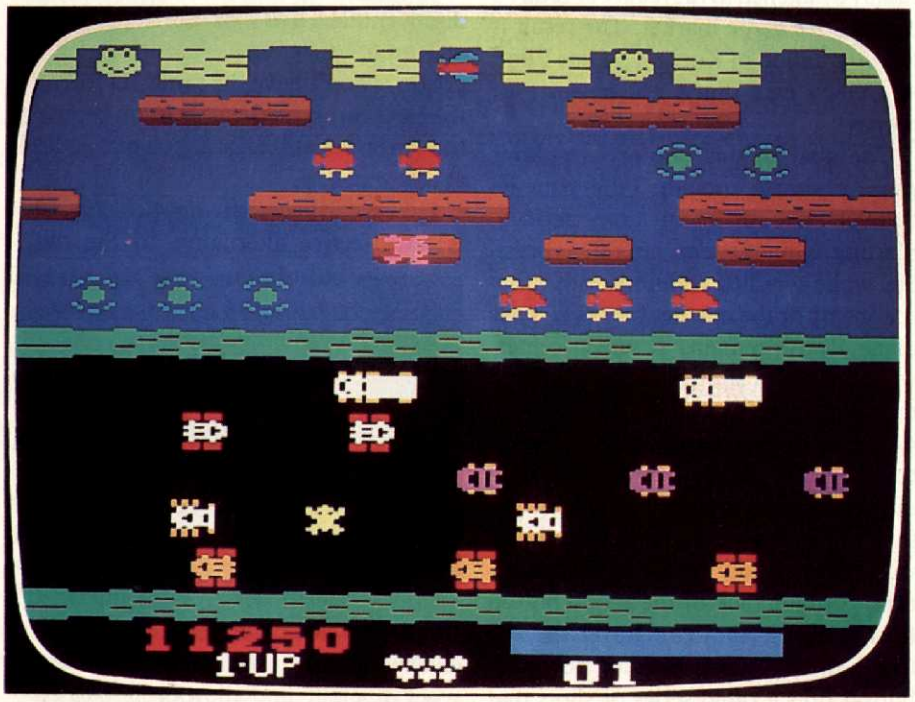
FROGGER

(Starpath/2600)

Welcome to "Name That Frogger", the game where you try to guess which software manufacturer is going to release yet another licensed version of Sega's popular arcade game. Here are the clues: This particular **Frogger** is for the Atari 2600, but it is not a cartridge. Instead, it is on a cassette tape that has to be loaded into this manufacturer's Supercharger expansion module. Can you "Name That Frogger"? Did I hear someone say "Starpath"?

But seriously, folks, through some sort of legal technicality that permitted Sega to license the ROM cart rights of Frogger to one company, while assigning the magnetic tape and disk rights to another, 2600 owners can now choose between two "official" Froggers. There is, of course, Parker Brothers' ROM cart version, one of the best selling games of 1982, and now there's also Starpath's version, which is a sublicense from the original tape license holder, Sierra On-Line.

The plot of this one or two player game is as easy as "Why did the Frogger cross the road?" In fact, that *is* the plot of Frogger, to get your frog across a road, and a river, and land him safely at the other side. Your frog starts at the bottom of the screen and is moved horizontally and vertically, one leap at a time, by the movement of your joystick. Your first job is to get him across a four lane highway, where vehicles such as tractors, race cars and trucks move at varying speeds and, strangely, in opposite directions from lane to lane. Make it to the middle of the screen without getting run over and you can take on the next challenge, crossing a raging river to get your frogger into one of the five niches at the top of the screen. To do so, you must leap from the backs of turtles and crocodiles to large and small floating logs, all of which travel horizontally across the screen.



Careful, though, because some of the turtles periodically dive under the surface. If they descend while your frog is resting on their backs, the dunk in the drink will cost you a life (somebody forgot to tell the designers at Sega that frogs can swim). Fortunately, the turtles change color before they dive, thus giving you a chance to leap to safety. If you hve to keep an eye on the turtles, you also have to watch where you jump on the crocodiles. While these reptiles' backs are benign, their mouths are not. Jump into their jaws, or the jaws of the crocodile that randomly appears in one of the niches, and your frog is done for. Meanwhile, you must get your frog home before the time limit, indicated by a shrinking bar at the bottom of the screen, runs out.

If the way home is treacherous, it is also quite liberally sprinkled with fringe benefits. Occasionally, a lady frog appears on one of the floating logs. If you hop Frogger onto this log and let Ms. Frog hop on his back, Frogger can carry her home for an extra 200 points. Another 200 point bonus can be netted by hopping Frogger into a niche where a fly appears. Filling all five niches wins you a healthy 1000 point bonus and advances the game to the next skill level where roads become more congested, stepping stones across the river become fewer, and such adversaries as snakes and otters are introduced to hound your poor frog. You start off with seven lives and are awarded a bonus life at 20,000 points. Setting the difficulty switches at "B" allows your frog to safely float off one edge of the screen and reappear at the other, while setting the switch at "A" causes contact with the edge of the screen to cost you a life.

In short, Starpath's Frogger is everything that Parker Brothers' Frogger is, only more so. The graphics are superb: Detailed, flicker-free, with especially good animation for Frogger himself. In fact, if the arcade game and Starpath's adaptation were placed side-by-side, one would be hard pressed to tell which was which, no small feat for the Atari 2600. The soundtrack doesn't have the wonderful two-part harmonies of the Parker Brothers' version, but it does keep the music track going through the entire game, playing everything from original melodies to *Yankee Doodle.*

Game play is easily learned and, at higher levels, complex enough to keep even experienced gamers fascinated. Joystick control is quick and responsive. Perhaps a little too responsive: occasionally, the rebound from my joystick accidentally sent my Frogger blundering into a car or stepping into the river. But that's about the only problem I could find in what is obviously a very well designed and engaging adaptation.

So which Frogger should you buy: Parker Brothers or Starpath? That depends. If you own the Parker Brothers version, then you already have a truly

fine adaptation and don't need the admittedly minor improvements of the Starpath game. If you have neither version but do have a Supercharger, then you will not only appreciate Starpath's superior graphics, but also the lower price of the cassette-based Frogger. And if you don't own a Supercharger at all, is it worth spending the additional money for one (currently about thirty to forth dollars) just to get Frogger?

Well, let me put it this way: the Supercharger comes packed with a game called Phaser Patrol, which happens to be the best Star Raiders-type game for the 2600. In addition to Frogger, Starpath also offers such games as Escape from the Mindmaster, an excellent first person maze game; Dragonstomper, an elaborate graphics-enhanced adventure; and the now classic Communist Mutants from Space. And all of Starpath's games carry price tags of fifteen dollars or under.

If all you want is Frogger, then go for the Parker Brothers. But if your interest in video games covers a wide range of subjects, then definitely check out the Supercharger system.

—D.P.

FROGGER

(Starpath/2600)

This new version of **Frogger** that plays on the Atari 2600 is not from Parker Brothers, but from Starpath. The game loads from a cassette through a device Starpath manufactures called the Supercharger, which plugs into the Atari 2600 slot. The Supercharger improves the Atari 2600's RAM, giving it better graphic capability and program memory when used with Starpath game cassettes. The games that Starpath has made for the Supercharger have been impressive so far, and Frogger is no exception.

Starpath purchased the rights to Frogger through Sierra On-Line, who owns the tape and disk rights; Parker Brothers owns the cartridge rights. Between the versions available from Parker, Sierra, and the many other companies that Sierra has sublicensed the game to, Frogger is undoubtedly the game that is available for more systems in more formats than any other game. It is appropriate that this is the first licensed game available for the Supercharger.

The object of Frogger is to safely maneuver a video frog across a busy

Commentary On A Dead Issue

A couple of weeks ago I evaluated a game from T&F Software called Speed Racer (or was it Street Racer?) for the Commodore 64, as a potentially reviewable game. I don't recall the exact name, because I removed the disk and packaging from my active list, and put it away with some of the other non-reviewed games.

As a game, it wasn't too bad. The idea is to drive a race car along a vertically scrolling street. You had control of the direction and speed of your racer. The farther you went in the allotted time, the more points you scored. There aren't many good driving games for the 64, and this did a pretty good job.

However, were I a totally irresponsible reviewer, I probably would have let this one through. But I'm not *totally* irresponsible. In the case of this game, besides scoring points for distance, you got good points and evil points. Good points were scored for avoiding the dogs, little old ladies, and various pedestrians who get in your way. Evil points were gained for *running them down.*

When you run the people and dogs down, they don't just disappear like some unknown alien, they leave a bloody red splatter on the screen. Now, I'm not naive, pompous, or stupid enough to say that a) anyone who sees this happen on screen is going to go out and do it, b) that this game is going to spoil our children, or c) selling this game should be prohibited. (It will probably die a well-deserved death, selling to collectors of grisly games).

However, this game *does* tell me a little about myself, and a little about our society. When I first saw the game run, I told myself that I might run over the people, but I'd spare the dog (who knows why?). Pretty soon, for the hell of it, I was occasionally knocking out both. This tells me that if I had a choice between a dog and a person, and the decision was unavoidable, I may have a bit of a problem. Maybe I watch too much killing on TV.

But that's precisely the point. Just passively *watching* all the killings on television and the movies has probably desensitized me to watching death and murder of *people.* In the case of this (and other games), where you are *actively, intentionally, bloodily killing* people and dogs, doesn't it make the actual acts that much less appalling? I think that it probably does.

If you score *more* points for killing people and dogs (in other words, you are rewarded for murder), wouldn't a real life reenactment seem to have some hidden rewards? We're all used to seeing graphic murders all the time (on the tube, at least). Actually doing it, even in a game, is possibly the next step.

Of course, not everyone will go out and kill somebody just because they played this game, or any other game, but there *is* a small fringe out there that *just might* believe that there are rewards for murder. I have reviewed many games (nearly all of them) where something is getting shot down, or ends in death. Even in Frogger or Pac-Man, each round often ends in death of the star, and an instantaneous reincarnation. When you zap a space invader, or blow up a rocket ship, who thinks that that invader or pilot may have had a family back home?

I'm not going to stop reviewing the shoot'em-up, zap'em, territorial or space games. They're my stock in trade. But the graphic violence certainly doesn't need a positive forum. (To its credit, Datamost puts a warning on the box for a new game, The Bilestoad, because it contains reasonably graphic violence, although most of it is abstract enough that children can't recognize what is really happening.)

What kind of person would design a game like Street Racer? What kind of company would distribute it? I am told by the public relations firm that works for T&F that there has been a lot of negative reaction to this game. The game has gotten our attention. It has gotten many people to say enough to all the killing in our video games. We now *know* T&F. And maybe that's what they wanted all along. They may have had to hit us over the head with a hammer, but now it's there, and the killing can no longer be ignored.

—Mark Brownstein

highway and across a river to his home. He must avoid snakes, otters, traffic, and running out of time among other things, but he may also eat a fly and escort a lady frog home for bonus points. Throughout the action, catchy music plays in the background.

The Starpath version of Frogger is perhaps the best video game version available. The graphics are beautifully colorful and detailed, and all of the nuances that made the game a hit in the arcade are kept. Because the Atari 2600 only allows two different sound channels to be used, the two-part harmony of the arcade is gone (one sound channel must be used for sound effects). The movement of the frog himself, however, was very easy. The joystick is very responsive in this game, and timing is similar to the coin-op original. There is a little flickering at times, but it is entirely negligible for most players.

With the price of the Supercharger marked down to under $30, including the excellent Phaser Patrol game, there is no reason for a serious Atari 2600 owner to be without it. Because the games come on cassette tape, they cost less ($15-$20). Using tape is only a minor inconvenience because the game load is less than 30 seconds. Starpath's Frogger is only one more example of how good the Supercharger really is.

—M.S.

VIDEO PINBALL

(Mattel/Intellivision)

Slated to be an early release, Mattel inexplicably dropped it from their coming attractions a while back. After receiving a Super Graphics technical facelift, **Video Pinball** has resurfaced and now sports an animated attract mode and excellent graphics. The colors and realism are outstanding!

The balls are slipperier than wet bass in butter sauce. You have to lead (or play ahead of) them in order to get any decent flipper action. There are five balls to start with, and you can earn more.

There's a variety of spinners, bumpers, and knockdowns to score with. There are hefty bonuses and multipliers as well as a GOLD ball. (doubles score values when in play) if you knock down all the tombstone targets on the first level. Use the body English widely and you'll TILT! and lose your bonus points. All the challenges of arcade pinball are to be found here.

Two things are needed to succeed, however; patience and mongoose quick reflexes. The patience is needed first to study the action of the attract mode, because it displays invaluable game playing tips.

It's also needed to practice the precision shooting so vital to success. (Here's where the mongoose comes into play because the bumpers seem to accelerate the ball to high Mach speeds.)

VP alternates between satisfaction and frustration because of the Rube Goldberg setup for earning rebounders in the "drain lanes", and in reaching the higher scoring red and blue screens.

Instead of advancing to higher levels or earning rebounders as reward for attaining a certain score, one must hit the proper targets to make a white cup appear in the top center of the playfield. Then you must get the same ball in the cup to advance from green (lowest) to red (medium). Do this again with the same ball and you advance to the blue (highest) screen.

This juggling act is one of those things in life that really is harder to accomplish than it sounds. If you don't advance, you go to the lower screen as soon as you lose the ball that got you there is the first place. There's absolutely no room for error here!

On the blue field you can earn an extra ball *if* you hit the same target *five* times in a row with the *same* ball; and then shoot that *same* ball into the white cup after it appears. Whew!

Though Pinball looks and sounds great, the bonus setup is overly complex. Anyone willing to devote enough time to master the angles can probably rack up some very high scores, but it's a shame that such devotion is even necessary. This remarkable effort would have been a classic if it was a little easier to attain the high scores normally associated with most true pinball games.

—T.S.

VIDEO PINBALL

(Mattel/Intellivision)

Mattel surprised just about everyone with its release of **Video Pinball.** Maybe they wanted to rush some games out in time for Christmas. Whatever the reason, it's good to have a pinball game for this system, if you like pinball games.

Intellivision Pinball is a pretty good adaptation of the long time arcade classics. This game is designed for one or two players, there are three progressively challenging screens, each one having many of the features that make pinball so much fun. Flippers can be controlled by keypad (which seems to work best), or lower fire buttons, which become a pain very rapidly. You can even jiggle the machine by pushing on the top of the disk.

If you like pinball, you should be pleasantly surprised by this Intellivision version. It isn't the real thing, but it's

not a bad substitute, either. —*M.S.*

FATHOM

(Imagic/2600)

Imagic is gone, done in by the brutal market of 1983. Fortunately, their memory lives on in this original rescue game for the Atari 2600.

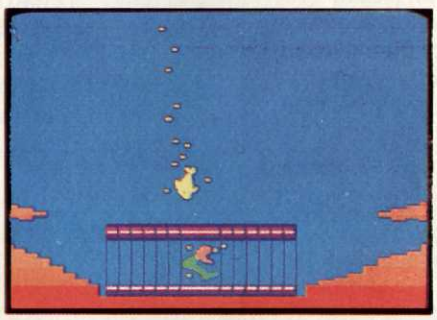
Remember the Titans who taunted Jason in No Escape? Well, they're at it again in this one-player game. This time they've trapped Neptune's daughter, Neptina, in a cage at the bottom of the sea in **Fathom**. It is up to you to save her by finding the three pieces of Neptune's trident that have been scattered across land and water. In the first stage of the game, you assume the guise of a dolphin. The joystick controls your direction up, down, left and right, while holding down the action button gives you the ability to swim underwater.

Once under the waves, you must dodge screenfuls of jellyfish (I don't care if the instructions call them octopi, they *look* like jellyfish), and rising corridors of kelp, while grabbing as many seahorses as possible. To advance from one screen to another, you exit off the bottom of the screen and reemerge from the top of the next. If you manage to grab all the seahorses in a particular jellyfish screen (exactly which screen that is varies according to which skill level you've reached), a star will appear. When grabbed, this star will award you one of the pieces of Neptune's trident.

Grab enough seahorses and a bird symbol at the bottom of the screen indicates that you may continue your quest in the air. This is done by swimming back through the screens you have completed, while avoiding obstacle courses of kelp and jellyfish along the way. Leaping up above the surface of the water passes the job on to the seagull, who is maneuvered in a manner similar to Joust: Left and right on the stick indicating the direction you wish to fly, while the action button flaps the birds wings. The more you flap, the higher and faster the gull will go, necessary in this case since you have considerably more area to cover above the waves than you do beneath.

You must reach screens by traveling horizontally across the water surface, avoiding the fireballs of erupting volcanoes that block your path along the way. When you reach the edge of an island, you can rise up into one or more cloud screens. Here you must dodge horizontal waves of black birds while touching the pink clouds that float across the screen. As in the underwater screens, grabbing all the clouds in certain screens without exiting will summon up a star that awards you with another piece of the trident. Don't dawdle too long on this section, though, because after a while the pink clouds turn into grey clouds. You still have to clear them out in order to retrieve the trident, but each grey cloud you contact loses you points.

After grabbing enough clouds, a



dolphin symbol appears to announce that you can complete your rescue mission. By returning the bird to the screen where the dolphin is frisking above the surface of the water and then pressing the action button, control is returned to the dolphin. Now you must dive back down through the jellyfish and kelp obstacle courses, grabbing a few seahorses for extra points along the way, until you reach Neptina's prison at the ocean's floor. Touching the cage opens it, awarding you the points accumulated during the round and freeing Neptina, who blows you a kiss across the bottom of the screen.

Game play then resumes at the next difficulty level. Each is distinguished not only by the increased number and aggressiveness of your adversaries but also by the greater number of screens that you must cover to achieve your rescue. In round one the sea is three screens deep and the sky is five screens wide by two screens high. In the second round the sea is four deep and the sky is seven by three, and so on. You start off each round with fifty points. As long as you have points, which are awarded for touching seahorses and pink clouds or for making the transition from sea to air or vice versa, the game continues. When you have run out of points, continually lost unit by unit as a measure of time, or by coming into contact with any of your foes, the game is over.

Designer Rob Fulop has taken the "give 'em enough rope and they'll hang themselves" philosophy in creating Fathom. Instead of locking you into a set pattern to achieve your goals, you are essentially free to roam wherever you want, whenever you want. Unless you can establish an efficient method of searching for the trident, this approach can prove disastrous, especially in the sky screens where you can find yourself floundering fruitlessly from board to board in search of those elusive stars.

Fortunately, the game is rewarding enough to make developing those skills very worthwhile. Expanding the area of search from round to round keeps the game intriguing. The graphics are, of course, excellent, the screens teeming with independently moving jellyfish and undulating seaweed. The swimming of the dolphin and the eruptions of the volcano are especially well animated.

Graphic designers Michael Becker and Wilfredo Aguilar have even added a few extra touches, such as having the dolphin change in size as he leaps from the water, nicely simulating the difference in refraction between liquid and air. I only wish that I was given the ability to change difficulty levels. Having pretty much mastered the first round, I would now really like to be able to start off with the second or third rounds.

The year 1983 h been a tough one around for game companies, but I never expected such an innovative shop as Imagic to give up the ghost. Imagic is not closing down completely; instead they will be designing games for other companies. However, the Imagic logo will cease to be seen on new cartridge releases. Nevertheless, in their two years of producing games for the Atari 2600, they conclusively proved that this "antiquated system" was capable of spectacular imagery and complex game play. In doing so, the folks at Imagic established an admirable reputation of originality and quality. So here's to Fathom, a game that continues to uphold Imagic's reputation and assures us that this company's releases will be remembered, and played, long after the output of Data Age and U.S. Games have been consigned to the scrap heap.

—*D.P.*

STATS

Top Ten Home Games

Present Position 11/26/83	Last Position 11/12/83	Weeks on Chart	Game
1	1	15	Q*bert (Parker Brothers)
2	2	15	Pole Position (Atari)
3	3	39	Ms. Pac-Man (Atari)
4	11	63	Frogger (Parker Brothers)
5	4	21	BurgerTime (Intellivision)
6	9	25	Enduro (Activision)
7	5	9	Mr. Do! (Coleco)
8	13	35	Centipede (Atari)
9	10	13	Decathalon (Activision)
10	7	19	Jungle Hunt (Atari)

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Top Arcade Games

	Percentage
1. Dragon's Lair (Cinematronics)	100.0
2. Star Wars (Atari)	76.1
3. Pole Position (Atari)	71.3
4. Champion Baseball (Sega)	63.8

Provisionally rated

1. M.A.C.H. 3 (Mylstar)	108.5
2. Track & Field (Konami/Centuri)	96.8
3. Cliff Hanger (Stern)	95.9
4. Discs of Tron (Bally)	81.6
5. Elevator Action (Taito)	68.0
6. Crystal Castles (Atari)	61.1

These are the top earning arcade games according to a poll of operators. Provisionally rated games had a response rate of less between 10 and 25 percent. © 1983 by Play Meter Magazine

HIGH SCORERS

(effective 12/14/83)

Baby Pac-Man	6,685,130	Richard Sattilaro Edison, N.J.
Bagman	6,840,850	Gerry McCloskey Pentieton, B.C. Canada
Buck Rogers	1,016,495	Kelly Keenan Santa Maria, CA
BurgerTime	5,882,950	Darren Kenney Lakewood, CA
Centipede	16,389,547	Jim Schneider Spring Valley, CA
Crystal Castles	846,547	Eric Ginner Milpitas, CA
Champion Baseball	1,130,560	Gus Papas Upland, CA
Defender	76,377,300	Burt Jennings Futhsom, N. Carolina
Dig Dug	4,129,600	Ken Arthur Blackburg, VA
Donkey Kong Jr.	1,259,300	Calvin Frampton Pleasant Grove, Utah
Dragon's Lair (3 men)	370,954	Kevin Crane Tulsa, OK
Food Fight	25,335,200	Gregory Jew San Lewis Obispo, CA
Frenzy	4,804,540	Mark Smith Shelby, North Carolina
Frontline	727,500	John Dunlea Wilmington, No. Carolina
Gorf	2,220,000	Jason Smith Midland, TX
Gravitar	4,722,200	Raymond Mueller Bolder, Colo.
Gyruss	28,051,900	Dave Wissman Cincinnati, OH
Guzzler	431,108	Mike Klug San Jose, CA
Joust (new chip)	101,192,900	Robert Gerhardt Lloydminster, Alberta, Can.
Jungle Hunt/King	1,510,220	Michael Torcello East Rochester, NY
Journey	12,181,850	Chuck Coss Stubenville, OH
Liberator	3,016,010	Sean Middleton Anchorage, Alaska
Lost Tomb	20,597,520	Bill McCalister Oskaloosa, Iowa
Millipede	4,702,733	Steve Winter Pompano, Fla.
Moon Patrol (7 cars)	1,214,600	Mark Robichek Mountain View, CA
Ms. Pac-Man	699,290	Chris Ayra Ft. Lauderdale, FL
Munch Mobile	2,035,540	Ivan Luengas No. Miami Beach, Fla.
Nibbler	838,322,160	Tom Asaki Bozeman, Montana
Pac-Man Plus	3,213,900	Shannon Ryan Upland, CA
Pengo (4 men)	1,110,370	Rodney Day Canberra, Australia
Pole Position E.T. 215.00	66,910	Mike Klug San Jose, CA
Popeye	1,439,430	Orlando Diaz Humaco, P.R.
Q*bert	32,204,485	Mike Lee Richmond, B.C. Canada
Quantum	1,387,420	Kevin Clark Columbus, OH
Robotron	511,834,625	Robert Bonney Kirkland, WI
Satan's Hollow	11,278,830	Brian Chapel Mesa, AZ
Sinistar	761,305	Chris Emery Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
Star Trek	100,067,500	Tim Collum Dayton, Ohio
Star Wars (6 shields)	52,041,781	Dave Palmer Rocklin, CA
Super Pac-Man	588,430	John Azzis Santa Maria, CA
Xevious	999,990	Don Morian Seattle, Washington
Zoo Keeper	11,915,060	Roury Hill Myrtle Beach, No. Carolina

Our thanks to Walter Day Jr., of Twin Galaxies International Scoreboard (228 East Main St., Ottumwa, Iowa 52501). Readers who think they might have a high score should send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Walter Day who will forward the necessary information and forms. Cities given are the location where the high scores were achieved.

ON YOUR MARK, GET SET...

W I N

WITH

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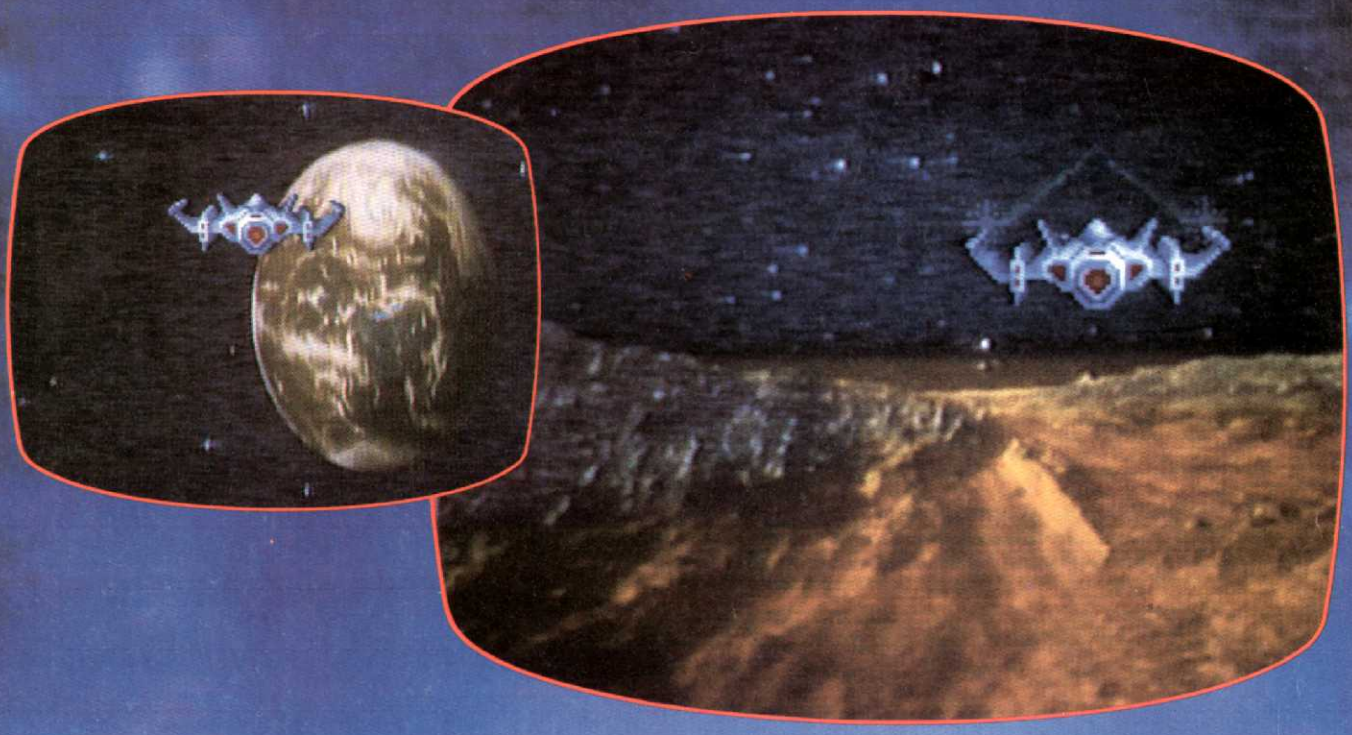

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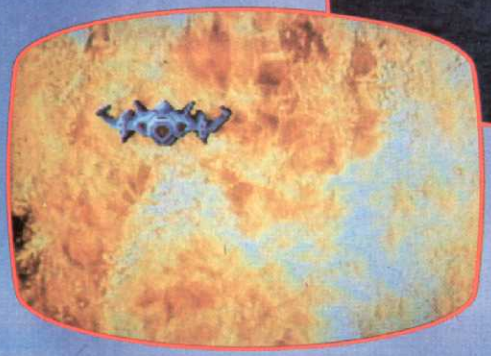

a laser video system from Bally MIDWAY

T.M.

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